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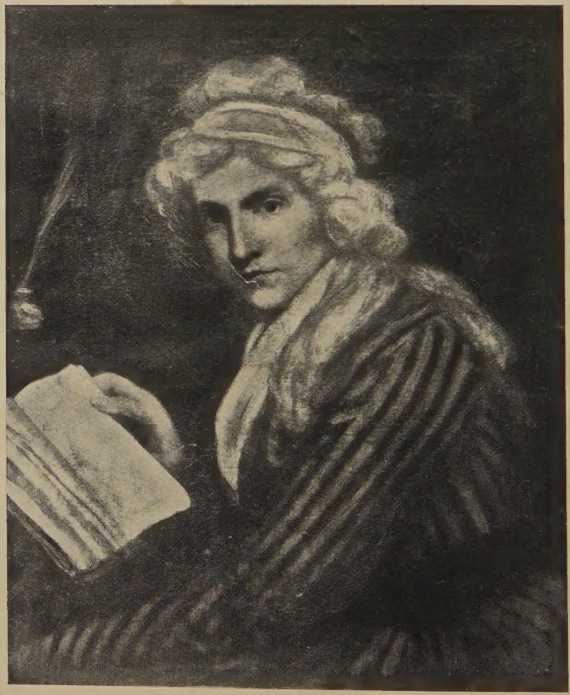

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

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THE ROADMAKER SERIES

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

(1759-1797)

by

MADELINE LINFORD

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John Austen

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INTRODUCTION

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT has her place in history as the great pioneer of the feminist movement. It was she, more than any other one person, who laid the first stones of that rough and painful road that has led to the enfranchisement of women and, among civilised races, an almost universal recognition of their rights as human beings. In her lifetime Mary saw her work scoffed at and shunned : after her death a storm of calumny beat upon her name. But to-day any student reading the history of the women's movement back through the patriotic labours of the Great War, the brave, pathetic struggles of the Suffragettes, the few lone efforts of Victorian days, comes inevitably to Mary Wollstonecraft's name as its founder.

The middle of the eighteenth century, the time of Mary's birth, was the period when the spiritual condition of women had reached its lowest point. In the first half of the century before, the Puritans had set a high

standard of morality, and morality in a nation is the greatest safeguard of her happiness that a woman can have. Reaction came with the Restoration, and the unashamed Seraglio, presided over by Charles II, lowered the status of women all through the country. Little girls were married when their age had barely reached double figures, and a married woman had no legal rights apart from her husband and no control over her children. The accession of the gross Kings of Hanover dragged their female subjects still further in the slough of ignorance and aimless lassitude. Women had at this time all the penalties of life and few of its honourable privileges. It was perhaps the most brutal age in English history, and a woman suffered for any petty crime in the same ruthless way that a man would do. She could be publicly burned or hanged or flogged, or transported to Botany Bay under conditions of extreme degradation. She had to stand helplessly by while the development of industrial machinery turned her small children into slaves working fourteen hours a day in factories or mines. The Church did nothing to help her, and the only religious sect that

granted her equality with man was the Society of Friends.

The ideal of marriage was very low. The sexual side of it was emphasised and the spiritual entirely ignored. Woman was an animal created for the physical delight of her husband, and to serve this function all her fragmentary education was directed. Modesty was the virtue most highly esteemed in the maiden, and modesty meant, not self-respect, but a sort of veneer of coy and pretty bashfulness which the omnipotent male would be pleased to trample down and smash. Delicate health, ignorance, helplessness, were all encouraged so that they might accentuate the flattering contrast of men's superiority. The eighteenth-century gentleman, quick with his sword, over-indulgent to his appetites, and not nice in his choice of language, liked to see his robust powers set off by the languorous, slender-brained creature beside him.

The obvious remedy was the establishment of a better relation between men and women, in which sex would be less predominant and comradeship possible. To the average eighteenth century mind a woman

had no *raison d'être* but the gratification of her husband and the care of her children. Those who did not marry were failures, and all they could hope for was that luck should offer some innocent diversion to occupy their idle hours. Education seemed to the few friends of the emancipation of women to be the only way of raising this low ideal. The literature of the eighteenth century is full of reactionary protests against the notion that women deserved a better education than the time had given them. The most famous obscurantist was Rousseau, whose diatribes on the subject are well known. As, for instance :—

" The education of women should always be relative to that of men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, to take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable ; these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy. . . . Women are specially made to please men."

Lord Chesterfield described women as being only children of a larger growth whom

a man of sense treats with the playful flattery that he would offer a sprightly child. Addison and Steele bemoaned the frivolity of the sex, and suggested that the great happiness of mankind depended upon the education of women. In 1776 Dr. Johnson remarked that the ladies of the present age were more faithful to their husbands and more virtuous in every respect than in former times, because their understandings were better cultivated. It is notable that, with the almost sole exception of Mary Wollstonecraft, women writers of the period opposed any movement for the intellectual advancement of their sex. Mrs. Barbauld and Hannah More were among the most emphatic upholders of the theory of female inferiority. In 1775 the enlightened Elizabeth Montagu proposed to found and endow a college for the higher education of women, and she offered the post of superintendent to Mrs. Barbauld. That virtuous lady refused with horror. Young ladies, she said, ought only to have such a general tincture of knowledge as to make them agreeable companions to a man of sense and to enable them to find rational entertainment for a solitary hour. The thefts of knowledge

in their sex were all connived at, while carefully concealed, and if displayed, punished with disgrace. Elizabeth Montagu shrugged her shoulders and accepted the standards of her time. The proposal was dropped, and not till seventy years later was any practical step taken for the better education of women.

Such, very briefly, was the state of spiritual darkness in the days when Mary Wollstonecraft passed her short life of thirty-eight years. She herself suffered at every turn from the narrow limits which bounded the range of her sex. She was hampered by poverty, poor education, the tyranny of men and by the hard conservative bitterness that greeted every step she took towards progress. Her life was nearly all tragedy, and her own impulsive heart led her into actions which the righteous could do nothing but condemn. But in her private existence she was never known to do an unworthy or selfish action, and in all that she wrote there is no word where prudence has dictated to conscience or courage failed to stand by the truth as Mary saw it. The sex that bears the children of the race will, to the end of time, carry

the heavier burdens of life, but the women of to-day are wonderfully free and honourable beings compared with the weak, sex-ridden creatures of a hundred and fifty years ago. Mary did not live to see any of the improvement for which she had striven. Women had not even begun to raise the herald note of salvation : " What must I do to be saved ? ", and they had no eyes for the little patch of road that Mary Wollstonecraft had laid—a road that, winding bravely through the years, would carry all the pride and privilege of their granddaughters.

CHAPTER ONE

The Wollstonecraft Family

IN the early part of the eighteenth century lived a prosperous manufacturer named Wollstonecraft. He was of Irish extraction and worked in Spitalfields. When he died he left a heritage of ten thousand pounds to his son, Edward John, who had married Elizabeth Dixon of Ballyshannon. Ten thousand pounds in those days was a very comfortable fortune for a young, middle-class couple, and so far as material prospects went the Wollstonecraft household started with high hopes of success.

The only flaw was the character of Edward. He had every vice that makes for domestic misery. He was ill-tempered and cruel, and he drank to excess. His father did not have him trained for a profession, and he had, in addition to ignorance, a natural inability to persevere in any work that offered itself. By the time his eldest child, Edward, was born, all the parental fortune had been lost,

and the family had begun its aimless migrations from one part of the country to another in search of prosperity. So numerous and transitory were these quests that it is impossible to say whether the second child, Mary, was born at Epping Forest or in London. The date was April 27th, 1759.

After Mary came four other children—James, Eliza, Everina and Charles. James went to sea in his boyhood and passes so soon out of the story that he needs no further mention. Edward became a fairly successful attorney, but was notable for little else than the astuteness with which he evaded all claims on his generosity. Eliza, Everina, and Charles grew up weak dependants on the strength and kindness of their elder sister.

The eighteenth century was not, at its best, a comfortable period for children, and to little Mary Wollstonecraft fell an uncommon weight of misery. Her early years were punctuated with dreary journeys by road in stuffy, jolting coaches, with failure behind and very faint hopes ahead. There was never time to settle smoothly into a place, stabilising oneself with childhood's eager, searching roots, before one was torn

away from it and the bitter, drunken father, the tired mother, the furniture and the fretful babies set off again on another aimless hunt.

By the time she was six, Mr. Wollstonecraft had decided that farming was his vocation, and the family settled for three years at Barking, in Essex.

Poverty would have been endurable enough if kindness had softened it, but neither of the Wollstonecraft parents had any store of this. The father was a brutal fury, subject to ungovernable fits of temper. He ill-treated his dogs, his children, even his wife. Sometimes his passion would be so violent that Mary, afraid to go to bed, would lie on the floor outside her room all night. She was always ready to defend her mother and would rush between her parents so that the blows aimed at the woman should fall on the child. It might have been expected that in return Mrs. Wollstonecraft would treat her with a tenderness that would mitigate some of the tyranny under which they both suffered. The household cursed with a cruel father has usually the mercy of a gentle mother too. But Mary was unfor-

tunate in both her parents. Mrs. Wollstonecraft was not perhaps a deliberately unkind woman, but she was harsh and unimaginative and she ruled by fear. She was a great believer in discipline—and discipline in the eighteenth century was a very grim word. She suffered under her husband, and she made her children suffer in their turn : the little tyrant strutting in the wake of the big one. Edward, the first born, was her darling, and the severity which rarely touched him fell with double force on her little daughter. Her harshness to Mary was indeed so vigorous and thorough that it perished there from very exhaustion and the lot of the younger children was made much easier.

In 1768, when Mary was nine years old, Mr. Wollstonecraft's desultory attempts to make a fortune in Barking came to the usual hapless end, and he ordered his family to pack up for a departure to Beverley, in Yorkshire, where he had taken another farm. This was by far the longest journey that they had made, and perhaps it was the uncomfortable memory of it that made the reckless head of the house stay in Yorkshire for the

unprecedented period of five years. Beverley was a small market town with a few indifferent schools, to one of which Mary was sent. She had had no education hitherto. Neither of her parents took any pride in the intellectual attainments of their children, and the constant migrations would have presented difficulties even to the most ardent educationists. Beverley added little to Mary's mental development, but she became fond of the place, which, with its rough, keen air, must have seemed very different from the soft mists and sunshine of Essex. She liked the houses and the shops whose small windows were bright with yellow barley sugar sticks or with the new patterned calicoes in crude gay colours. Many years later she re-visited Beverley, and was disappointed to find how small the glories of childish memory shrank in the light of disillusioned reality.

Mary, on the threshold of her teens, was a wild thing, with spirits that managed to soar triumphantly above the miseries of her home. She had no affection for the dolls and needlework that were the conventional pursuits of the young female of her time. She loved to

join in the outdoor recreations of her brothers —the kite-flying and ball games and the dangerous experiments with bows and arrows. One can picture her running through the rocky Yorkshire fields after the proud and pampered Edward, her beautiful auburn hair streaming like a banner in the wind and her legs hampered by the long, narrow skirts of her cotton gown. At home much of the care of the younger children fell to her, and it was in those early years that she developed the half-maternal protectiveness that made her throughout the rest of her life try to act as a buffer between her sisters and the hard conditions into which they were all born.

By the year 1774 Mr. Wollstonecraft had grown tired of farming and probably by that time, too, Beverley and its sober citizens had grown very tired of him. He decided to return to commerce, and the family moved to Hoxton in the north of London. There they found themselves living next door to a Mr. Clare, a clergyman, and his wife. Mr. Clare was delicate and lived the retired existence of a recluse. He was eccentric, but he was cultured and very widely read, with a special fondness for poetry. It is a proof of

the good sense of himself and his wife that they had the discernment to choose from their neighbours' unpromising household the one member whose friendship was worth cultivating. This was Mary, aged sixteen. Mr. Clare, whose clerical duties, if any, do not seem to have been arduous, took a great interest in the development of this virgin mind. To him she owed the real foundations of her education. She spent days together in his house, reading his ponderous books and listening to his words of scholarly, bookworm wisdom. The strongest characteristic in Mary's nature was always her capacity for pity : " I love most people best when they are in adversity, for pity is one of my prevailing passions," she wrote years after—and so it is possible that Mr. Clare's ill-health and narrow existence made her more inclined than she would otherwise have been to sit at this hermit's feet. Mrs. Clare, too, was fond of her, and proved a sincere friend for many years. She took Mary out with her on little expeditions of pleasure to various parts of London. One day they went to the village of Newington Butts, and there Mary met the great friend of her youth, Frances Blood.

The Blood household was in many respects a duplicate of the Wollstonecraft. Its poverty was mainly caused by the drunken idleness of the father and the inefficiency of a delicate mother. There were young children, and, the burden of their support fell on Fanny, who, eighteen when Mary first met her, was a gentle, accomplished girl, with a fine and delicate mind. She was musical and literary in her tastes, but it was by her skill in drawing that she earned enough money to support her entire family. Very slight additional help was given by the small sums that Mrs. Blood could make by selling needlework.

On the day that Mrs. Clare took Mary to Newington Butts, they found Fanny busy preparing a meal for her little brothers and sisters. It was a scene that made an instant appeal both to Mary's sense of the picturesque and to her sympathy. The small, clean house, meagre and drab with poverty : the wastrel father and clamorous children : Fanny's brave, unselfish courage, sacrificing her youth to her parents' shiftlessness. Mary made in her heart a vow of eternal friendship with Fanny, and this she never broke. It lasted to the time of Fanny's

death, and then went on in Mary's faithful memory. No love that ever came into Mary's stormy life had quite the strength and sweetness of this sudden and passionate affection for Fanny. Till then she had had small outlet for the demonstrative warmth of her nature, and she poured out the whole treasure on the first person she had met who was really worthy of it.

With Hoxton in the north of London and Newington Butts in the south, the two friends could not meet very often. Transport was a slight affair then, and people unable to afford carriages had to make their journeys on foot through the filthy and ill-lighted city streets. So correspondence formed the principal supports for this new and eager friendship.

Mary was soon humiliated to find that the letters she sent to Fanny were far inferior to those she received in her turn. They were not so well expressed and the spelling was erratic. To be sure, there was two years' difference between the ages of the girls, but Mary felt that there was a far greater discrepancy than that between Fanny's careful, neat epistles and her own impetuous replies. She was fired with ambition to

improve herself, to struggle up to the level of excellence that had been revealed. Mr. Clare, his books and his dusty store of accumulated wisdom, took on a new significance. He was the only person at hand to help her, and the education begun half-heartedly before the visit to Newington Butts, sprang into glowing life and enthusiasm immediately after it. Mary trudged through dull and learned books, and found at the end of them that the pleasure had been infinitely worth the pains : she tried to write so that her letters would interest the beloved Fanny, and in so doing realised that here was a way of expressing her thoughts, of releasing the boisterous company of ideas that thronged her growing mind. For the first time in her life she was happy. The sordid frets of her home did not seem so overwhelming now that she had Fanny's friendship and this great incentive to ambition. A wide field of interest had opened before her and she could lose herself in it sometimes and forget that Mr. Wollstonecraft's drunken bouts occurred at increasingly short intervals, and that Eliza and Everina screamed and quarrelled half the day through.

But, her father being what he was, this pleasant life could not be expected to last for long. In 1776, the domestic tyrant decided to turn his talents once more to agriculture and the family left Hoxton and went to Pembroke.

Though exiled from her friends, Mary went diligently on with her studies. She had developed an amazing capacity for work and her industry was unflagging. Her ambition and her progress increased so rapidly that during the year spent in Wales she asked to be allowed to leave home and try to earn her own living. This was refused. Mrs. Wollstonecraft had come to regard Mary as a defence against the husband's brutality and to appreciate the quality of the daughter whose childhood she had embittered with harshness. She would not now willingly lose her. By this time Mary had made herself something of a personality in the household. She was given a room to herself, and her hours of study were left undisturbed. The fact that she had the strongest character of the family began to be realised by the others. She did not always trouble to conceal the contempt she felt for

her father and he, growing mentally weakened by dissipation, was cowed by the scornful brown eyes of his young daughter. William Goodwin, in his memoir of Mary, says: "Her conduct during her girlhood was such as to extort some portion of affection from her mother and to hold her father in considerable awe." Probably at this time Mary's religion had become a great source of strength to her. The Wollstonecrafts professed the faith of the Church of England, but they had taken no trouble to carry profession into practice or to instruct their children in the tenets of the Church. Mary had created a faith of her own, with a firm belief in the goodness of God and, for those days, an unorthodox distrust of the existence of Hell. All through her life religion was the lamp to her feet and even in the darkest places she never lost sight of it.

At the end of 1777 Mr. Wollstonecraft decided that the delights of Wales had grown into a weariness and the familiar marching orders were given to his wife and children. This time Mary exerted her new influence. It was obvious that all places were alike to her versatile parent, but there was only one

centre of life for her and that was the place where Fanny Blood lived. So she urged that the next halting ground should be Walworth, and for a little while the friends were once more together.

While they lived at Walworth, Mary reopened the subject of earning a living. The family fortunes were at a very low ebb, and Mr. Wollstonecraft's power of increasing them was dwindling from little into nothing. Meeting Fanny again had impressed once more on her mind the fact that a young girl could by her own industry support a number of brothers and sisters. Mary wanted to free herself from the humiliating—and inadequate—support of a man she despised, and she wanted also to free Eliza, Everina and Charles from it. This time her request was granted. She found a situation as companion to Mrs. Dawson of Bath, and set off in 1778 on the long journey to the west of England.

Mrs. Dawson was a lady of very peculiar temper. She had had a long succession of companions in a comparatively short time, and had driven away each one by her ill-humour and tyranny. In Mary she found

her match and, to their mutual surprise, the young girl and the cross-grained old woman lived in something like harmony for two years. Mr. Wollstonecraft had hardened Mary to ill-temper, and after his drunken frenzies, the nagging and flustered fury of Mrs. Dawson must have seemed a fairly easy storm to weather. At any rate, she managed it somehow, with immense patience and courage, and her employer would sometimes confess that Mary was the only companion she had had in her treatment of whom she felt herself under any restraint. That in itself speaks volumes for the woeful circumstance of Mary's predecessors !

The two years were very unhappy years for Mary herself. She was nineteen when she went to Bath and she was pretty and full of high spirits. Bath then was the centre of gaiety and of intellectualism relaxing itself. Dr. Johnson and Boswell had stayed there two years before, and it was the rendezvous for all that was rich and famous in the country. The town in the height of its season spread out a pageant of sunshine and luxury : beautiful gowns and scents, powdered wigs, dancing, theatricals and a band playing in

the square. Mary, hidden away in Hoxton or Pembroke, could endure the grey drudgery of her life, but it must have been hard to spend her days in a shadow of a cantankerous woman while youth played in the sunshine all round her. She had no time to console herself with books, and through a dull tangle of petty duties, squabbles and abuse the two years dragged slowly to a sudden end. This was caused by the news of Mrs. Wollstonecraft's illness.

When Mary reached home—that uncertainty being now at Enfield—she found that her mother was dying. Mrs. Wollstonecraft's life had been a hard one since the day when she linked it with that of Edward John. She had borne six children to a bad and drunken father, and something unyielding and twisted in her own nature had kept her from realising the happiness that motherhood in any circumstances can bring. She had no vision of the compensations of her lot. Poverty had crushed her down, and the constant, hopeless wandering from place to place had worn away her strength. Her children had not brought her comfort because she had not looked to them for it, and

she never tried to forget her own miseries in an endeavour to brighten the sombre morning of their lives. When her health began to fail she had no power or will to fight for it.

Eliza and Everina were at home to nurse her, but she would accept no services from anyone save Mary, who waited on her day and night. The illness was long, though from the beginning there was never any uncertainty as to the end of it. At last she died, murmuring as her parting words: "A little patience and all will be over!" And one cannot doubt that she was glad to go.

CHAPTER TWO

Eliza Bishop and Fanny Blood

MARY was twenty-one years of age when her mother died. Her great ambition was to become a teacher, to pass on some of the learning she had gained through the efforts of Fanny and Mr. Clare. But she could see no immediate prospect of this. Her health was not good and the long strain of nursing the mother had further weakened her. Eliza and Everina, younger and much more helpless than herself, were powerless to support the home, which was tumbling into hopeless ruin. Soon after his wife's death it became obvious that Mr. Wollstonecraft was no longer fit company for his daughters. He had fallen so low that it was not possible for them to go on sharing a house with him, and the difficulty then arose as to what refuge they could find.

The problem was solved more or less happily for two of them and tragically for the third. Mary went to live with the Bloods

and Everina became housekeeper for her brother Edward : Eliza—a wild, excitable unbalanced creature—married in haste a Mr. Bishop, and repented nearly as quickly.

The Blood family was then living at Walham Green. Fanny still drew pictures for a living and Mrs. Blood earned a little by sewing. Mary, also, by needlework, contributed her share to the household exchequer and passed an uneventful two years in this quiet and humdrum way. She was happy to be living under the same roof as Fanny, but in many respects the new home was not much more pleasant than the one she had left. Mr. Blood's vices were of an equal quality to those of Mr. Wollstonecraft, and one of his daughters had begun a steady descent down the slippery hill of immorality. After Fanny, Mary's favourite was a son, George, who cherished an unrequited passion for Everina. This alone was enough to win Mary's eager sympathy and then her affection, and for several years she kept up a sisterly correspondence with him.

Fanny's own affairs were not going smoothly. She had fallen in love with a young and successful merchant, named Hugh

Skeys, and had entered into an engagement with him which was wholehearted on her side and shilly-shallying on his. He seemed unable to make up his mind whether to take the plunge into matrimony or to retire permanently from the brink. Perhaps he was discouraged by the unfortunate surroundings in which his lady lived. At any rate, he tortured her with his uncertainties : now lifting her to pinnacles of bliss by his ardent protestations and then, by indifference and neglect, casting her down into pits of dejection. It is a situation in which many loving women have found themselves, but that would have seemed poor consolation to Fanny. Her spirits and her health suffered irreparable damage through the vacillation of Mr. Skeys. Mary, devoted to her friend and not understanding the instability of a naturally weak nature, was loud in her indignation. Fanny was so sweet, so clever so infinitely above the man she had chosen to love : it was monstrous that he should be thus dilatory and half-hearted in his wooing. Her anxiety to see the affair brought to fruition was due more to love for her friend than to any great confidence in the joys of

matrimony. What she had seen of wedded love as personified by Mr. Wollstonecraft and Mr. Blood had tainted her opinion of the institution itself. At this time, too, another bad example was added to her gallery.

The youngest of the Wollstonecraft sisters, Eliza, had a temperament of which it is charitable to say that it needed very careful handling. She had the family characteristics of sensitiveness and excitability, and in her case they were sharpened into meanness by a small, fretful nature. She took offence at trifles, and cherished the trifles till they overshadowed all the rest of life. Her temper, like some turbulent Vesuvius, always churned and spat just below the surface of her mind, and when some insignificance brought it into life, no volcano could be less easily soothed into peace again. It would have needed an angel to live in harmony with her, and Mr. Bishop was far from that. He was, in fact, very much a duplicate of herself, with the added disadvantage that his morals were not high. He was a brute and a sensualist, toadying to those in loftier positions than himself and a bully to the weaklings in his power. It was not to be expected that this

union would be happy, and before very long the constant quarrelling and violence had brought Eliza to the borders of insanity. She was expecting a child, and the combined physical and mental strain proved too much for a nature that at its best was not well poised. It became necessary for someone to watch her constantly and an appeal was sent to the eldest sister .

Mary folded up her sewing, kissed the tearful Fanny, and set off at once for the Bishops' unhappy house. There she found Eliza frenzied with insanity and the husband throwing faggots on to her madness with his tempers and unkindness. Mary's stay in this household was a very terrible experience for a girl of twenty-four. The time that she did not spend soothing Eliza had to be devoted to hearing the arguments with which the smooth-tongued Mr. Bishop urged his excuses for the condition of his wife. He, the sycophant, must have felt considerable respect for his sister-in-law ; he was obviously anxious that she should not think too hardly of him. " My spirits are harried with listening to *pros* and *cons*," wrote Mary in a letter to Everina, " and my head is so confused

that I sometimes say no when I ought to say yes. My heart is almost broken with listening to B. while he reasons the case. I cannot insult him with advice, which he would never have wanted if he was capable of attending to it."

So the days went on till Eliza's daughter was born into a world that had little good to offer her. The young mother—for Eliza could have been barely twenty then—had recovered her senses, and sadness had blunted the edges of excitability. What Mary had seen of Mr. Bishop had convinced her that it was impossible for Eliza to go on living with him. "Nothing can be done until she leaves the house," she wrote to Everina. "I have been some time deliberating on this, for I can't help pitying B., but misery must be his portion, at any rate until he alters himself, and that would be a miracle. . . . Those who would save Bess must act and not talk." It is worth noting that Mary's ready charity did not even altogether fail the unworthy Bishop.

Mr. Bishop, when reasoned with, refused to let his wife go. Edward was appealed to, but he was not anxious to have the

responsibility or expense of his sister, and satisfied his somnolent conscience by reminding it that people must lie on the beds they had made for themselves, even when the bed included a brutal husband and the prospect of permanent insanity. So Mary took matters into her own hands and one day when Bishop was out, the sisters left the house for ever, leaving the hapless baby behind. They had a dreadful coach journey to Hackney, afraid every minute that they would be detected. Grief at losing her baby and the general excitement brought back a temporary flash of Eliza's insanity, in which she bit her wedding ring to pieces. At night, in the harbour of modest lodgings, Mary wrote to Everina in a breathless burst of dread fears :

" I hope B. will not discover us, for I would sooner face a lion ; yet the door never opens but I expect to see him, panting for breath. Ask Ned how we are to behave if he should find us out, for Bess is determined not to return. Can he force her ? but I'll not suppose it, yet I can think of nothing else. She is sleepy and going to bed ; my agitated mind will not permit me. Don't tell Charles

or any creature. Oh ! let me entreat you to be careful, for Bess does not dread him now as much as I do."

And then next day, a thought for the poor deserted baby :

" . . . Bess is tolerably well : she cannot help sighing about little Mary, whom she tenderly loved ; and on this score I both love and pity her. The poor brat ! it had got a little hold on my affections : some time or other I hope we shall get it."

The sisters were forced to keep hidden for some time lest the ogre should discover them. But they were not too shut away to miss the shocked reproaches of many of their friends. It was considered a shameful thing for Mary Wollstonecraft to have enticed Eliza Bishop away from her lawful owner. A bad husband was a cross that a good wife should bear with meekness : under no circumstances should she throw the cross down and run away from it. Far better to live in misery and degradation all the rest of one's life than to scandalise society by flight. Mr. Bishop, with a fine sense of dramatic effect, swallowed down his wrath and showed the world the sad picture of a deserted, heartbroken husband with only

his motherless infant to gladden his darkened life. He worked on Edward's not too susceptible feelings till it was all that Everina, still the housekeeper, could do to keep the brother firm in his promise not to hand Eliza back like a lamb to the slaughter. Mrs. Clare, the clergyman's wife, was a little shocked by Mary's revolutionary conduct, but she remained her friend. Many other people refused to have anything more to do with the Wollstonecraft family. It was Mary's first glimpse of the mud and calumny that lie in wait for pioneers.

Mary now had to consider the problem of supporting Eliza, and after much discussion it was decided that they should open a school at Islington, where Fanny Blood was then living. Edward was invited to help with the preliminary expenses, but his prudence forbade him. Mary was a born teacher, but Islington did not seem to be interested in this fact and its children stayed away.

In a few months the venture was moved to Newington Green where the prospects seemed better.

Here a house was rented and Mary started with a nucleus of twenty children. In

addition she had a few boarders—a Mrs. Campbell and her son and another lady with three children. The Wollstonecraft prospects suddenly seemed to have become rosy.

Mary, at the head of a school, was a thoroughly happy person. She was only twenty-five at the time, but early cares had heaped the weight of invisible years on her shoulders. She was fond of children and joyful for the chance to pass on the learning she had with difficulty acquired. Her school must have been one of the typical dame schools of the period, with a great deal of attention to deportment and vain repetitions of mechanical accuracy and not much scope for originality to sprout in the prim little minds of her scholars. Perhaps it was more cheerful than other schools because of the youth of Mary, with her bright hair sternly tucked away under a muslin cap, and of the erratic excitements of Eliza.

William Godwin has left an interesting description of Mary at this time: "Mary had a quickness of temper, not apt to take offence with inadvertencies, but which led her to look into the minds of her acquaintance, and to approve or be displeased, in

proportion as they manifested those sentiments. . . . She was occasionally severe and imperious in her resentments ; and when she strongly disapproved, was apt to express her censure in terms that gave a very humiliating sensation to the person against whom it was directed. Her displeasure, however, never assumed its severest form, but when it was barbed by disappointment. . . . She scorned to make use of an ungenerous advantage or to wound the defenceless. To her servants there never was a mistress more considerate or more kind. With children she was a mirror of patience. . . . . Her heart was the seat of every benevolent feeling ; and accordingly in all her intercourse with children it was kindness and sympathy alone that prompted her conduct."

Godwin did not know Mary in her Newington Green days, and so his information must have been gained from one or other of her friends, of whom she had an increasingly wide and interesting circle. The owner of a school and a little boarding house was a personage of some importance, and in this instance the graces of talent and good

looks were added to social position. People began to notice Mary, and then to admire and love her. One of her great friends was Dr. Richard Price, a dissenting minister, who was one of the best-known men of his day and held the freedom of the City of London. He had written many essays on finance, which had favourably impressed Pitt, and a pamphlet on the American War of Independence. He was a man of fine character, and Mary became deeply attached to him. His influence caused her to break down some of the rigid walls that bound her belief in the Church of England. Sometimes she went to the Nonconformist chapel to hear Dr. Price ; then next Sunday she would return to the Te Deum and majestic liturgy ; and at length, in the chain of working days between Sunday and Sunday, she would decide that the love of God could fill any number of different coloured vessels, and then perhaps flow over for the lowly and unbelieving. Another kind friend to Mary was Mrs. Burgh, the widow of a man who wrote a now-forgotten book called *Political Disquisitions*. On one red-letter day the young schoolmistress met a bulky old gentleman

named Samuel Johnson, who talked to her for a long time with keen interest. He asked her to come and see him, but as he died in the December of the same year—1784—she never met him again.

Early in 1785, the hesitant lover, Hugh Skeys, at last brought himself to the point of marrying Fanny Blood. He had a good business appointment in Lisbon, and by this time uncertainty and disappointment had reduced Fanny to a condition of health that made him fear that a little more vacillation and he would lose her altogether. So in February, when the snowdrops were blooming in Mary's garden, the two were married and set off for Portugal. The tears that Mary shed when she parted with her friend were bitter with indignation against the complacent bridegroom. She hated him for the cruelty of his long delays, and she was convinced that he was not good enough for the gentle creature he had married. "Her tenderness and delicacy," she wrote in a letter to George Blood, "are not even dreamed of by a man who would be satisfied with the fondness of one of the general men and women."

Soon after Fanny's departure, Mary's affairs began to look less cheerful. Her own health was poor and her boarders were not punctilious in the payment of their debts to her. Besides the care of her own family, she felt herself more or less responsible for Mr. and Mrs. Blood. George, the victim of bad friends and slanderous enemies, had fled to Ireland, where he stayed till his brother-in-law found him work in Lisbon. Mary's days were heavy with work and her nights haunted by the dread of utter failure and ruin. The little school, started so hopefully, became the hard, unprofitable rind of a career from which all the sweetness and colour had dripped away.

Then came urgent news from Fanny. Mary must, please, be with her when her baby was born. Mary could very ill afford just then to leave the school and the neglectful boarders in the incapable hands of Eliza, but all through her life there is no record that she ever failed to respond to a claim on her generosity. She packed up a little trunk and set off in the autumn of 1785, paying her way with a sum of money lent to her by Mrs. Burgh. The journey to Lisbon was a

long one in those days, and a great adventure for a woman to take alone. Mary was thirteen days at sea, in a high storm, and most of the time was occupied in nursing a poor invalid man whose own womenfolk were too sick to attend to him. Four hours after her weary arrival at the Skeys' house, Fanny's son was born, and a few days later the frail mother died. Heartbroken, Mary started back for home. She had lost the person she loved best in the world, and ahead she could see nothing but darkness. Ten years later, her memory of Fanny was still so vivid and fragrant that she could write : " The grave has closed over a dear friend, the friend of my youth : still she is with me, and I hear her soft voice warbling as I stray over the heath."

CHAPTER THREE

Lady Kingsborough

THE sadness with which Mary left Lisbon deepened into despair when she reached home. Eliza had quarrelled with Mrs. Disney, their most profitable boarder, and a mother of the three boys, and she was about to remove to a rival establishment. The school was burdened with debts, and the rent of the house had become a terror that no efforts could dispel. Mary felt that her strength was not equal to a struggle against the slings and arrows that outrageous fortune was showering upon her. She was ill and tired and, probably from temporary weakness, her eyesight began to fail.

There was no one to whom she could turn for help : indeed, almost every person that she knew was more or less dependent on her. Mr. Wollstonecraft had married again, but his wife—a respectable woman—was powerless to drag him back to the paths of decent living which he had deserted so long ago.

They had settled at Laugharne in Wales, with Charles, the youngest of the family, who was still little more than a child. Constant appeals from this wretched home were made to Mary. She had every cause to hate her father, but she never failed to send him a share of whatever money she had. Then there were Mr. and Mrs. Blood. George had thrown up his Lisbon position and was now looking for work in Ireland. Mr. Skeys refused to accept the burden of his dead wife's shiftless parents and was glad to forget their existence. Perhaps it was because her love for Fanny had been so much greater than his that Mary could not bring herself to ignore their miseries. The Bloods were among the peering, anxious faces that haunted the darkness each troubled night when she lay down and tried to sleep. In addition she had the care of her two sisters. Edward, whose prosperity was increasing, still kept discreetly deaf to requests for pecuniary help.

Mary had returned from Lisbon, after a month at sea, at the end of January, 1786, and by August affairs at Newington Green reached a crisis. Eliza and Everina found

situations as governesses and Mary moved into cheap lodgings where she could live on the fees of the few pupils that still remained with her. She did all her own housework and every penny that she could save was put aside for the payment of her debts.

By way of relaxation she began to attempt literary work, and a practical friend, Mr. Hewlet, persuaded her to try to write a complete book which might bring her money and reputation. So she sorted out her experiences and thoughts and her half-matured theories of life, and spent long hours toiling by candlelight over her first literary venture. It was called, in the unwieldy fashion of the day : *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters : With Reflections on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life.*

There is nothing very remarkable about this book except in the glimpses it gives of Mary's mind. It is immature and, like most works of the period, pompous and didactic in style. It is the green bud of Mary's later development, a *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in embryo form. In construction it is a series of treatises, covering the education of a middle-class girl from the cradle to the

nuptial altar. At the beginning she insists that the first foundation of education is good health, which, though a commonplace nowadays, was an advanced and revolutionary theory in days when physical delicacy and a becoming pallor were held to be part of the feminine charm. Youth's rebellion against the trammels of hoary tradition bursts out in more than one place: "I am sick of hearing of the sublimity of Milton, the elegance and harmony of Pope, and the original untaught genius of Shakespeare. These cursory remarks are made by some who know nothing of nature." It is a paraphrase, in smooth language, of sentiments that any young girl might utter to-day.

This pamphlet was offered to Mr. Johnson, a publisher of St. Paul's Churchyard, who published many of the principal books of the day, including those of Cowper, the Edgeworths, Mrs. Barbauld and Fuseli. He was a staunch friend to Mary all the rest of her life, and by introducing her to him this literary attempt brought her more lasting good than any she had hoped to find in fame or money. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* was published in 1787, and Mr.

Johnson paid her ten guineas for the copyright.

The ten guineas were immediately handed over to Mr. and Mrs. Blood. Mary was sorely in need of money herself and could have found many urgent uses for it. But dear Fanny's parents wanted to leave England and go to Dublin where, with pathetic and futile optimism, they fancied they could begin life afresh and in a more admirable manner. Ten guineas would help to pay their fares, so they took the money and went, leaving Mary with her kind hands empty and no visible fruits of her first little book.

Mary's friends at this time included a Mr. Prior, assistant master at Eton, and his wife. It was through them that she heard that Lady Kingsborough, the wife of an Irish nobleman, was in search of a governess for her daughters. Mary hesitated for some time before she decided to apply for this situation. The thin and lonely life of a governess did not appeal to her. She pictured herself cut off from her friends and isolated in uncongenial company, with all her treasured independence lost. But Lady Kingsborough offered a salary of forty pounds a year, and there were

debts to be paid. It was too good an opportunity to be ignored. Mr. and Mrs. Prior were preparing for a trip to Ireland, and it was arranged that Mary should travel with them. The intervening time she spent in their house at Eton. While she was there, she made a careful study of the principles and practices of the famous school and disapproved very thoroughly of all that she saw. This indignation she treasured till she found a bitter outlet for it in *The Rights of Woman*.

In October, 1787, the three started off for Ireland, and Mary was left at Kingsborough's castle in Mitchelstown. When she arrived, weary and despondent, she found the house full of society women to whom a new governess was an object for merciless criticism and ridicule. Lady Kingsborough, besides her daughters, had staying in the house her stepmother, three step-sisters, and a number of guests. The state of society in Ireland then was almost incredibly bad. The poor lived scarcely better than animals : among the rich the women were frivolous and irresponsible and the men were exceedingly coarse. Standards of morality were very low, and foul talk was not considered out of place in

any lady's drawing-room. It was a new and uncomfortable atmosphere for Mary Wollstonecraft, and there is a strong undercurrent of home-sickness in the first letter she sent to her sister.

"The Castle, Mitchelstown,

"*October* 30*th*, 1787.

"Well, my dear girl, I am at length arrived at my journey's end. I sigh when I say so, but it matters not, I must labour for content, and try to reconcile myself to a state which is contrary to every feeling of my soul. I can scarcely persuade myself that I am awake; my whole life appears like a frightful vision, and equally disjointed. I have been so very low-spirited for some days past, I could not write. All the moments I could spend in solitude were lost in sorrow and unavailing tears. There was such a solemn kind of stupidity about this place as froze my very blood. I entered the great gates with the same kind of feeling as I should have if I was going into the Bastille. You can make allowance for the feelings which the General would term

ridiculous or artificial. I found I was to encounter a host of females—My Lady, her step-mother and three sisters, and Mrses. and Misses without number, who, of course, would examine me with the most minute attention. I cannot attempt to give you a description of the family, I am so low ; I will only mention some of the things which particularly worry me. I am sure much more is expected from me than I am equal to. With respect to French, I am certain Mr. P. has misled them, and I expect in consequence of it to be very much mortified. Lady K. is a shrewd, clever woman, a great talker. I have not seen much of her, as she is confined to her room by a sore throat ; but I have seen half a dozen of her companions, I mean, not her children, but her dogs. To see a woman, without any softness in her manners, caressing animals, and using infantine expressions, is, you may conceive, very absurd and ludicrous, but a fine lady is a new species to me of animal. I am, however, treated like a gentlewoman by every part of the family, but the forms and parades of high life suit not

my mind. . . . The children are, literally speaking, wild Irish, unformed and not very pleasing ; but you shall have a full and true account, my dear girl, in a few days. . . .

"I am, your affectionate sister and sincere friend,

"MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT."

By November 5th, Mary, a little more cheerful in spirits, sent Eliza a further account of her employers :

"Lady K. is a clever woman and a well-meaning one, but not of the order of being that I could love. With his lordship I have had little conversation, but his countenance does not promise more than good humour and a little *fun* not refined. . . . I have committed to my care three girls, the eldest fourteen, by no means handsome, yet a sweet girl. She has a wonderful capacity, but she has such a multiplicity of employments it has not room to expand itself, and in all probability will be lost in a heap of rubbish, miscalled accomplishments. I am grieved

at being obliged to continue so wrong a system. She is very much afraid of her mother—that such a creature should be ruled with a rod of iron when tenderness would lead her anywhere."

Mary was physically comfortable in the Kingsborough household, but spiritually she was miserable and lonely. She found nothing in common between herself and the fine ladies of Mitchelstown. In the drawing-room the main topics of conversation were marriage and dress: in the schoolroom education was supposed to run along the same narrow channels. Lady Kingsborough, rouging her cheeks and taking the dogs to bed with her, did not know how keenly she was being watched by the young governess. In *The Rights of Women* there are many passages in which Mary's recollections of this lady are plainly and coldly set out.

The smug and pampered dogs were one of the trials of Mary's life, and in nearly all her letters home there is some reference to them. Another annoyance was the manner in which she was expected to train the children in her charge. Lady Kingsborough saw no use

in education except as an additional adornment to display in the marriage market and all that she cared about for her daughters was that they should make good matches as early as possible. With this end in view, she insisted that their minds should be decked with bright irrelevant ribbons of accomplishments. A little music, a little painting, a smattering of prettily-spoken French. Neither their brains nor their characters mattered very much so long as they could present a docile and desirable appearance to the omnipotent male. One of her rules was that the girls' reading should be carefully restricted and here Mary rebelled. Anticipating Ruskin long before his time, she urged that a girl let loose in a library will instinctively reject what is advanced beyond the grasp of her intellect.

The pupil in whom Mary found most satisfaction was Margaret, the eldest, mentioned in the letter to Eliza Bishop. Margaret, William Godwin says, "was in an an uncommon degree cordial and affectionate" and she became very much attached to her governess. The love was later the undoing of both of them, but while it lasted it

was an inspiration to the girl and a great consolation to the woman. No human relationship is more ardent and single-hearted than the affection of a young girl for an older member of her sex. The golden hero-worship of Margaret must have been very sweet to Mary's warm heart, still sick and lonely with the grief of Fanny's death. Many years afterwards Margaret, then Lady Mountcashel, met Mary's daughter, Mrs. Percy Bysshe Shelley, in Italy, and her talk was tender with memories of the governess of Mitchelstown days.

All through the year Mary stayed with the Kingsboroughs, swallowing down her dislike of the bloated dogs and trying to join in with a show of civil interest in the drawing-room topics of gowns and suitors. Most of her life was spent with the children, but Lady Kingsborough had discovered that the wit and good looks of the governess made her a social asset, and she was often summoned to help in the entertainment of guests. She sent long letters to her sisters and to the kind publisher, Mr. Johnson, describing the minor frets of her life and the anxiety that bad health was causing her. In return, Eliza

and Everina wrote of the financial difficulties that never seemed to lighten. Edward had made a definite refusal to do any more at all for their father. . . . Edward could not be made to give up a sum of money that was in his possession, but legally belonged to the sisters. Mary found many demands on her hardly-earned forty pounds a year.

In the new year of 1788 the Kingsborough family moved to Dublin for the season, and the gaiety, the laughter, the drawing-room jests and ribaldries deepened in excitement. One day in March Mary was taken to a masked ball, wearing a black domino that Lady Kingsborough had lent her. Another of the party went as a woman native of some newly-discovered island, and Mary acted as an interpreter. Her quick and witty tongue made her a great success. "We were," she says, with a little touch of pardonable complacence, "a tolerable, nay, a much-admired group."

In her spare time she read Rousseau's *Emile* and wrote a novel called *Mary*, which was a requiem to her dead friend. It was published anonymously in the same year and has now practically disappeared. Later in

the spring she moved with her employers to Bristol, and then to Bath, where she found herself haunted with memories of those two flurried years with Mrs. Dawson. Her health improved in England, but she did not become more reconciled to the empty frivolity of the fashionable life or to the undercurrent of coarseness that sullied it. Her position was made more uncomfortable by the growing dislike shown to her by Lady Kingsborough. The devoted dog-lover had begun to be seized by maternal jealousy. She had taken no trouble to gain her children's affection, but she resented the wealth of it that had been heaped on the governess. With the tactlessness of youth, the young Kings made no secret of the fact that they preferred the kind and sympathetic Mary to their cold mother. Margaret fretted for her when she was away and would not be consoled. It was a situation which a mother could not be expected to relish, and Lady Kingsborough was profoundly annoyed. In the autumn of 1788, while the family was in London, she dismissed Mary from her service.

At least it was escape from a life that she

hated. Mary's only regret is shown in a letter that she wrote soon after her dismissal.

"I had, the other day, the satisfaction of again receiving a letter from my poor dear Margaret. With all the mother's fondness, I could transcribe a part of it. She says every day her affection to me, and dependence on heaven, increase, etc. I miss her innocent caresses, and sometimes indulge a pleasing hope that she may be allowed to cheer my childless age, if I am to live to be old. At any rate, I may hear of the virtues I may not contemplate."

With Margaret's affectionate, tear-blurred letters warm in her pocket, she went to see Mr. Johnson in St. Paul's Churchyard to ask his help and advice.

CHAPTER FOUR

George Street

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT to Everina, on November 7th, 1788.

" . . . Mr. Johnson, whose uncommon kindness, I believe, has saved me from despair and vexation I shrink back from, and feared to encounter, assures me that if I exert my talents in writing I may support myself in a comfortable way. I am then going to be the first of a new genus ; I tremble at the attempt, yet if I fail I only suffer, and should I succeed my dear girls will ever in sickness have a home, and a refuge where, for a few months in the year, they may forget the cares that disturb the rest. I shall strain every nerve to obtain a situation for Eliza nearer town : in short, I am once more involved in schemes, heaven only knows whether they will answer ! yet while they are pursued life slips away. I could not on any account inform my father or Edward of my designs—you and Eliza are the only part

of the family I am interested about, I wish to be a mother to you both. . . . This project has long floated in my mind. You know I am not born to tread in the beaten track, the peculiar bent of my nature pushes me on."

Mary, aged twenty-nine, full of doubts and tremors, yet anxious " to be a mother " to her sisters and ease the rigour of their lives, established herself in cheap lodgings in George Street, near Blackfriars Bridge, and laid in a stock of new quill pens. She had embarked on a new venture which seemed to her to hold more threats and promises than the little school at Newington Green or the situation with the Kingsboroughs. She was to earn a living by writing.

In the letter to Everina, Mary described herself as " the first of a new genus," but this may be taken as a small touch of youthful self-importance. Authorship as a career for women was not yet respectable, but it was condoned. An unmarried woman who produced a book was given the title of " Mrs.", as though wedlock was needed to legitimize the children of the brain. A correctly-brought up girl took immense pains to hide

her identity when she turned novelist, and she feared the light of publicity as somehow unrefined and a little shocking. When her guilty secret was discovered, she was lionised by the few and shunned by the multitude. She was not expected to marry—indeed, by stepping over the trim hedges of her sex she had also walked out of the radius of the marriage market—and she was easily forgiven any eccentricities in dress. But in spite of discouragement, the intellectual renaissance of the latter eighteenth century had stirred many women to authorship. The Blue-Stockings were holding their salons in Mrs. Vesey's house in Clarges Street or under the generous hospitality of Mrs. Montagu. Elizabeth Carter, the witty linguist of the coterie, and the most slovenly of all of them, had gained an international reputation, and her translation of *Epictetus* was read even in Russia, where, as the translator herself expressed it, " they were only just beginning to walk on their hind legs." By the time Mary Wollstonecraft settled in London, Fanny Burney had published *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, and had begun her unfertile period of service to Queen Charlotte. Hannah More had

started on her immense output of matter with two plays, *Percy* and *The Fatal Falsehood*, and good Mrs. Barbauld, who held the belief that "the best way for a woman to acquire knowledge is from conversation with a father or brother or friend," had more happily written *Hymns in Prose for Children*—a series of nature studies in not insignificant prose. Jane Austen was still a little girl in Steventon Parsonage, and Maria Edgeworth and her learned father had not been heard of outside their Irish village.

Mr. Johnson had promised Mary that she should not lack work, so at least she had few financial anxieties. She became his "reader," which means she passed judgment on manuscripts sent in to him; and she translated a number of foreign works into English. She was also a regular contributor to the *Analytical Review*—a philosophical journal started by Johnson in 1788.

So her time was filled and she worked diligently from morning till night. She was still very poor, for this type of literary work was not well paid, and she had to send constant help to her family. Her rooms were very meagrely furnished, and it was with great

difficulty that she managed to scrape together enough money to buy a bed for her sisters to sleep in when they stayed with her. One day Talleyrand visited her, and she had to offer him wine in teacups because she could not afford glasses. Someone spoke of her as a "philosophical sloven," with shabby gowns and hair hanging loosely over her shoulders, but this was due to poverty and stress of work rather than to natural indifference. Some of her money was going to pay the expenses of Everina, who, so that she might learn the language, stayed for two years in France at her sister's expense. After many changes of situation, Eliza settled down for a time in Pembrokeshire.

Through her friendship with the Johnsons, Mary made a number of acquaintances among the literary people of the day. It is significant of her charm and intelligence that in every stage of her life she attracted the notice of the greatest intellects around her. Mr. Johnson treated her almost like a daughter, and among her friends she included Dr. George Fordyce, Henry Fuseli, Bonnycastle, Thomas Paine, and George Anderson. Among her own sex she was intimate with

Mrs. Barbauld and Mrs. Trimmer. The latter was the author of *Fabulous Histories*, which were moral tales about animals. At the age of fifteen she had met Dr. Johnson, who was so much impressed by her youthful pomposity that he invited her to his house and presented her with a copy of *The Rambler*. "I spent a day at Mrs. Trimmer's," wrote Mary to Everina, "and found her a truly respectable woman!" A very faithful friend, Miss Hayes, was discovered in a curious way. Miss Hayes sent in a volume of essays to Johnson and Mary, in her capacity of reader, had to deal with them. She disliked the preface and in a long letter explained this to the author with her usual clear-sighted candour. Miss Hayes had a nature large enough to appreciate honest frankness and the two became firm friends. Mary's leisure was well filled with good and stimulating companionship, and her three years in George Street passed pleasantly on.

Mary must have had a natural gift for languages, because it is obvious that her educational opportunities for acquiring them had been few. Mr. Clare probably started her with the rudiments of grammar, and

syntax and her own good brains did the rest. At any rate Mr. Johnson seems to have had every confidence in her as a translator of solemn and portentous books. She was fluent with French, a little hesitant in Italian, and while she was in London she became on familiar terms with the German language. One of her publications was an excellent translation of Salzmann's *Elements of Morality*, which so pleased the author that he returned the compliment by translating Mary's own book, *The Rights of Woman*, into German. She also translated the Dutch of *Young Grandison*, the German *Young Robinson* and the French *Religious Opinions*.

In 1791 Mr. Johnson published another little book written by Mary herself. This was *Original Stories from Real Life: With Conversations calculated to Regulate the Affections and form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*. It was illustrated by William Blake, the revolutionary poet of "Tiger, tiger, burning bright," who mixed his colours with diluted glue in a manner revealed to him by Saint Joseph.

It was the custom of those days to disguise the powder of instruction very thinly with

jam. Books written for children were intended to improve rather than to entertain, to thrust moral teaching into every innocent joy or sorrow of the springtime of life. They saw sermons in stones, fables in flowers and every singing bird on a bough of apple-blossom was a reminder of the omnipotent wrath of God. The children of the Fairchild family, so that they may learn the fate of those who quarrel in the nursery, are taken to see a corpse hanging from a gibbet : when Harry steals an apple, he is reminded of fire and brimstone. A child who lived before Victoria's day could never count his little store of tightly-bound, drab-coloured books as adding in any way to the trivial decoration of his life.

Mary Wollstonecraft, though so tender with children, was no exception to the rule. In *Original Stories* she pours down instruction in thick and nauseating draughts. The heroines are Mary and Caroline, aged twelve and fourteen, who are orphans and have been sadly neglected. At the opening of the book they fall into the whaleboned care of Mrs. Mason, who sets about to train their characters and intellects. This terrifying lady

is a sort of female composite of Mr. Fairchild and Mr. Barlow, tutor of Sandford and Merton. She moves through the book momentously benevolent, turning the cold lamp of reason across the path of young, skipping feet. She takes her charges on a conducted tour through life, never allowing them to be out of her sight and never letting one pebble of moral precept remain unturned. She has a genius for twisting every slender incident into a peg on which to hang a weighty discourse. Nothing is hidden from her or is too deep for her understanding : no situation ever finds her unprepared with a suitable text and sermon. " ' I declare I cannot go to sleep,' says little Mary. ' I am afraid of Mrs. Mason's eyes.' "

These are traces in the book of the ponderous style of *Elements of Morality*, as though some of the wisps of her translation work were still clinging to Mary's mind. But lightness of touch was not esteemed then, and *Original Stories* must have burdened life in many nurseries. It had a fair success, and at least Blake's illustrations are wholly charming and sweet. He has an optimistic and idealised way of handling Mrs. Mason, and he seizes

with eager fingers on every ray of sunshine that filters through the gloom.

While Mary was living in George Street, the French Revolution had swelled from a faint rumbling into a vast and deafening tumult. England rocked with the echoes of it, and every thinking man held passionate views for one section or the other. Dr. Richard Price, the nonconformist friend of Mary, preached a sermon warmly supporting the actions of the French Republicans, and in November, 1790, Edmund Burke replied to Dr. Price with *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In this he defended the claims of those who inherit rights from generations of ancestors, and spoke with contempt of the aspirations of peasants. He urged the poor to remain in the state of life into which it had pleased God to call them, and to console themselves for present misfortunes with the thought of the "final proportions of eternal justice." He wept over the misery of Marie Antoinette: "Little did I dream that I should live to see such disaster fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men—in a nation of men of honour and cavaliers. . . . But the age of chivalry is

gone. That of sophists, economists and calculators has succeeded, and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever."

Mary Wollstonecraft read these *Reflections*, and then seized her pen with hot and trembling fingers. She was angered first by Burke's attacks on her friend, Dr. Price, and then by his enunciation of principles that seemed to her utterly and wantonly wrong. In a white heat of indignation she wrote her reply, the *Vindication of the Rights of Man*. This, in some ways, is the finest thing she published. It has the defects of its qualities, the ungoverned ruthlessness that is common to white heat. Mary was too angry always to think before she wrote, and so sometimes she descends to vituperation and undignified personalities. By the time she was half-way through, some of her zeal had slipped away and she was inclined to put aside the manuscript and forget it. Mr. Johnson persuaded her to persevere, and she re-read the reactionary sentiments of Burke and started off again in a fresh burst of indignation.

There are many fine qualities in this *Vindication*, which is now scarcely read at all.

It is sincere, well-written and, except when Mary's enthusiasm overbalances her, logical and full of thought. It is a passionate defence of the rights of the humble and a denunciation of the tyranny of wealth. "The demon of property has ever been at hand to encroach on the sacred rights of man." She stamps her foot at the smooth periods and reasoned arguments of the great Burke. "Among all your plausible arguments and witty illustrations, your contempt for the poor always appears conspicuous and rouses my indignation. The rights of man, to give you, Sir, a short definition of their disputed right, is such a degree of liberty, civil and religious, as is compatible with the liberty of the other individuals with whom he is united in a social compact." It was a bold and splendid sentiment for days when a rich man still had feudal rights over his servants and could starve or torture his tenants to his heart's content. Burke's lamentations over the sad Queen of France made no appeal to Mary, whose heart was heavy with thoughts of a thousand peasant mothers burdened with poverty. She writes: "Misery, to reach your heart, I perceive,

must have its caps and bells ; your tears are reserved, very naturally, considering your character, for the declarations of the theatre or for the downfall of queens, whose rank throws a graceful veil over vices which degrade humanity ; but the distress of many industrious mothers whose helpmates have been torn from them, and the hungry cry of helpless babes were vulgar sorrows that could not move your commiseration, though they might extort your alms."

The publication of this pamphlet brought Mary considerable fame. It was the first thing she had written that definitely brought her into prominence as a serious and politically-minded woman. Any schoolmistress with a facile pen could have produced *Original Stories* or *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, or the slim novel, *Mary*, but it was only the exceptional mind that could answer Burke with such clear-tongued directness. The rooms in George Street became a centre of attraction, and Mary had often to get out her teacups and wine for the entertainment of the great.

But Mary was not altogether happy. Family cares, quiescent for a while, had begun

to stir again and worry her. Eliza Bishop, on the way to her situation in Pembrokeshire, went, in May, 1791, to visit the paternal home at Laugharne. The accounts she sent were not encouraging. "Father's ghastly visage," she writes to Everina, "haunts me night and day." The wretched Wollstonecraft was reduced to such a state that he could not walk ten yards without panting for breath and constantly falling, and he coughed and groaned all through the night. His countenance, according to his shocked daughter, was "constantly convulsed by ill-humour and every unamiable feeling that can be expressed; his face is quite red, his hair grey and dirty, his beard long, and the clothes he wears not worth sixpence."

Charles, the youngest of the family, was running wild and half naked, and his time was spent in unedifying quarrels with his father.

There was nothing to be done for her father except to send gifts of money, but Mary's generous heart could not endure the thought of the neglected young brother. Charles was brought to George Street and fitted out with clothes. He lived there with

his sister and for a while was articled to Edward, the prudent eldest brother. This experiment was unsuccessful, and Charles announced that he would like to emigrate to America and try farming. By way of preparation for this he was sent to an English farm to serve an apprenticeship. Mr. Johnson says that during Mary's three years in George Street she must have spent at least two hundred pounds on her family. It is hardly to be wondered at that her gowns were shabby and her china cupboard poorly stocked. For a time, too, she took charge of a little girl of seven years of age, a relative of Mr. Skeys, widower of Fanny.

Yet in spite of the worries and stress of her busy life, the great work of her career, the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, was begun, and completed in six weeks' time.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Rights of Woman

THE year 1791 was remarkable for its literary publications. The industrious Boswell issued his *Life of Dr. Johnson*, and Paine's *Rights of Man* was burned by the public hangman. Fanny Burney, weary of courtiers and gowns, brought out *The Wanderer*, which nobody remembers now. Mrs. Inchbauld, a member of Mary Wollstonecraft's circle, wrote *A Simple Story*. This, according to Professor C. H. Herford, is a "powerful picture of passion, more prophetic of *Jane Eyre* than any other English novel of the eighteenth century." An ingenious romance of crime and mystery, *The Romance of the Forest*, appeared from the pen of Mrs. Radcliffe.

Among these and other notable books of the year, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* took a prominent place. It was greeted with a storm of discussion, much censure and a little discrim-

inating praise. In contrast to the restrained and measured eloquence of the day it was hot and quivering with the earnestness of its author, and this seemed to many people an indecent stripping of the soul in public print. Its doctrines were revolutionary, and it dealt with subjects from which the modest woman turned away her head. Even now, when most of its theories have hardened into facts it is still reprinted and easily procurable. The reader with patience to follow Mary's flights and heavy ecstasies will find the book an interesting study.

Remembering their interesting conversation over the tea-cups, Mary dedicated her book to "M. Talleyrand-Périgord, late Bishop of Autun." In a preface addressed to him she states what is really the text of her long discourse.

"I have repeatedly asserted, and produced what appeared to me irrefragable arguments drawn from matters of fact to prove my assertion, that women cannot by force be confined to domestic concerns; for they will, however ignorant, intermeddle with more weighty affairs, neglecting private duties only to disturb, by cunning tricks, the orderly

plans of reason which rise above their comprehension.

"Besides, whilst they are only made to acquire personal accomplishments, men will seek for pleasure in variety, and faithless husbands will make faithless wives; such ignorant beings, indeed, will be very excusable when, not taught to respect public good, nor allowed any civil rights, they attempt to do themselves justice by retaliation.

"The box of mischief thus opened in society, what is to preserve private virtue, the only security of public freedom and universal happiness?"

It is Pandora—bored, indolent and lonely—dipping her inquisitive fingers into mischief that her intellect could not encompass.

Mary starts out with a praiseworthy determination not to hamper the flow of her thoughts by decking them in literary style. She aims, she says, at being useful, and sincerity will render her unaffected: for "wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments than dazzle by the eloquence of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming

from the head, never reach the heart. I shall be employed about things, not words ! and, anxious to render my sex more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slided from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation." It is an excellent aim, and the only flaw in it is Mary's complete failure to follow it. Her impetuous feet stumble into every error that she has carefully indicated as to be avoided. The brassy phrase, " turgid bombast," blares its meaning through every other page of the book and " flowery diction " riots across them. Mary addresses impassioned appeals to the Diety, to suffering womenkind, to callous, inconsiderate man. She models her sentences in the dank, heavy clay of the Johnsonian pattern and loses her argument a thousand times in her ecstacy of rhetoric. But her sincerity never falters and there is no sentiment that is not based on common-sense and purity of motive. The book was written from a sense of duty, with a heartfelt desire to strike an honest blow for her sex, and no faults of style and literary judgment can blind the reader to the courage with

which Mary Wollstonecraft set out on her crusade to win freedom and self-respect for other women.

The main theme is a protest against the doctrines of Rousseau expressed in his *Emile*. Chapter V deals with him in summary detail, but Mary's indignation against the philosopher's yashmak attitude towards women is scattered through the whole book with a lavish hand. On the whole, the arguments are moderate rather than extravagant, and the religious tone is very strong.

The *Vindication* opens with a picture of the contemporary state of women—ill-educated, forced within a narrow circle of interests, and of little account save for the several gratification of men. Milton's Eve tells Adam that

> "God is thy law, thou mine; to know no more
> Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise."

and Rousseau urges that a wife should cling to her husband's superior understanding as ivy clings to an oak. Mary, thinking of her own father and of the dissolute father of Fanny Blood, says: "But, alas! husbands, as well as their helpmates, are often only

overgrown children—nay, thanks to early debauchery, scarcely men in their outward form—and if the blind lead the blind, one need not come from heaven to tell us the consequence." She exclaims against the pernicious notion that for a girl to take ordinary exercise savoured of immodesty, and that delicate health was a sure way of retaining a husband's roving affection. Sedentary life and too much enforced idleness spent listening to the gossip of their elders, she considers to be the causes of many of the defects with which girls grew into womanhood. It was not desirable that young Miss should love to sit quietly indoors, dressing and undressing her doll, and growing wise in the vanities and limitations of her sex. Let her play in the open air with her brothers, her innocence untainted by false ideas of shame, and her spirits not dulled by inactivity. So the laughing child would be mother to a woman far in advance of the ignorant, over-sexed creatures who aroused Mary's pity and scorn.

Sex is considered to be the cause of most of the degradation suffered by women. Because they are the source of his pleasure, man exalts them sensually and ignores them

in every other way. He cares nothing for their minds or souls :—

"Ah! why do women . . . not discover, when 'in the noon of beauty's power,' that they are treated like queens only to be deluded by hollow respect, till they are led to resign, or not assume, their natural prerogatives? Confined, then, in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. It is true they are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin; but health, liberty and virtue are given in exchange. . . . A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it, though it may excite a horse-laugh. I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behaviour. For this distinction is, I am firmly persuaded, the foundation of the weakness of character ascribed to woman; is the cause why the understanding is neglected, whilst accomplishments are acquired with sedulous care; and the same cause accounts for their preferring the graceful before the heroic virtues."

Women, Mary thinks, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilisation and missed the useful fruit. Novels, music, poetry and gallantry, all tend to make them the creatures of sensation, and fragility is cultivated at the cost of commonsense. It is obvious that the fragmentary education of Margaret King still rankles in Mary's mind as she bitterly returns time after time to the folly of teaching accomplishments on a foundation of direst ignorance. She urges that women should be educated, not so much to have power over men, as to have it over themselves, for "ignorance is a frail base for virtue." Even in these clear-sighted days of the twentieth century this dictum might be more widely proclaimed.

Mary paints a picture of the typical society woman, the amiable, voluptuous mistress of her legal owner, and is so greatly shocked by the sight that she indulges in a burst of expostulation and entreaty to God. Lady Kingsborough, who appears again in the description of a fine lady, foolishly fond of dogs, is certainly the model for this painting. In her dealings with the married state, the author has a habit of plain-spokenness, which

would be coarse if it were not so candid. It was not the custom of the period to mince words, and Mary was too anxious to make her meaning clear to allow any risk of obscuring it with pruderies.

It is in a better system of education that Mary sees the moral salvation of the race. She considers "schools, as they are now regulated, the hotbeds of vice and folly, and the knowledge of human nature, supposed to be attained there, merely cunning selfishness. At school, boys become gluttons and slovens, and instead of cultivating domestic affections, very early rush into the libertinism, which destroys the constitution before it is formed ; hardening the heart as it weakens the understanding." She disapproves of boarding schools, and also of the irregular and spasmodic instruction of home tutors. At the former the relaxation of the younger boys is mischief, and of the elders vice. Religion is a mere form in schools, where a boy is fined half-a-guinea for neglecting Holy Communion and services are a gabble of unheeded repetitions. The few days Mary spent at Eton live again in her resentful pages.

The solution is the establishment of

national day schools. They must be supported by the Government because "whilst school-masters are dependent on the caprice of parents, little exertion can be expected from them, more than is necessary to please ignorant people." The master is only anxious that his pupils shall reflect to his own credit and so insure a comfortable pocketful of fees. In Mary's ideal national school boys and girls would be taught together and premature sex-consciousness avoided. There should be no differences of rank and rich and poor should meet on equal terms.

"And to prevent any of the distinctions of vanity, they should be dressed alike, and all obliged to submit to the same discipline or leave the school. The schoolroom ought to be surrounded by a large piece of ground, in which the children might be usefully exercised, for at this age they should not be confined to any sedentary employment for more than an hour at a time. But these relaxations might all be rendered a part of elementary education, for many things improve and amuse the senses when introduced as a kind of show, to the principles of which drily laid down, children would turn a deaf ear.

For instance, botany, mechanics and astronomy, reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and some simple experiments in natural philosophy, might fill up the day ; but these pursuits should never encroach on gymnastic plays in the open air. The elements of religion, history, the history of man, and politics, might also be taught by conversations in the Socratic form."

After the age of nine, these well-informed children should be given a more specialised training suited to the future career of each individual. The boys should learn mechanical trades, and the girls the arts of domesticity. Right up to the end the main lines of study should be co-educational. This should lead to early marriage, a cleaner moral tone and more health and independence for women. The Dalton plan is forecast in the suggestion that rewards and punishments should be fixed by the children themselves and not by the masters.

Thus equipped, wide vistas open out before the unemancipated sex. Mary sees women as doctors, farmers, shopkeepers, and in every kind of business. She demands votes for them, and then that they should sit

in Parliament. And this in 1791, five years after a woman was publicly burned for coining, and when babies of five years old worked for fourteen hours a day in cotton mills and mines.

The book ends with a few finely-written pages expressing Mary's hopes for the spiritual advancement of her sex. She wants virtue for them first, and then understanding. She urges men to remember that these are the two indispensable characteristics of a good wife and mother. They regard women mainly as a sexual being—an Eve created to solace a lonely Adam—but let them not forget that "true voluptuousness must proceed from the mind—for what can equal the sensations produced by mutual affection, supported by mutual respect? . . . Yes, let me tell the libertine of fancy when he despises understanding in women—that the mind, which he disregards, gives life to the enthusiastic affection from which rapture, shortlived as it is, alone can flow! And that, without virtue, a sexual attachment must expire, like a tallow candle in the socket, creating intolerable disgust."

Even from this brief summary it will be

seen how far *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* soared above the common ideals of the time. A woman in those days was a being whose primary reason for existence was the gratification of the condescending male. Her education was all directed towards this. She learned a few accomplishments, a smattering of ornamental wisdom, so she might be an entertaining companion in the hero's hours of ease. She decked herself in modesty and shy virtue because the lusty conqueror loved to feel himself ruthless tramping over lily fields on his way to possession. Sometimes she rebelled against her destined lot, and wrote books or attended the Blue Stocking salons. And then she was scarcely a woman at all, but an unsexed being of no importance. It was not for her that Mary Wollstonecraft wrote. Her plea was for the little girls growing up to maidenhood in unimaginative, middle-class homes. She wanted better things for them than she had had herself. She had been uneducated, ill-treated, shadowed by ill-health. She had faced the desperate struggle for a livelihood, which must be made by untrained women whose fathers made no provision for them

and took no thought for their future. Mr. Wollstonecraft, dissipating his fortune, was not affected by the consideration that his three daughters would have to battle against the world with a very poor physical and mental equipment. Mary had seen Eliza driven to madness by a husband's tyranny, and Fanny Blood paling and drooping at the caprice of Mr. Skeys. All the bitter memories of her childhood and youth crowded about her during the six weeks that she spent writing this brave, impetuous book.

As a literary production, the *Vindication* is full of faults. It is pompous and stilted and crowded with platitudes. The matter is pitchforked together with a hastiness that shows too plainly the short time that was devoted to it, and the main theme is constantly clogged with irrelevancy. To be really effective, its character should have been reasoned and speculative, and, in fact, it is almost entirely rhetorical. William Godwin described it as "a very unequal performance, and eminently deficient in method and arrangement." But he added that it was "an epocha in the subject to which it belongs;

and Mary Wollstonecraft will perhaps hereafter be found to have performed a more substantial service for the cause of her sex than all the other writers, male or female, that ever felt themselves animated by the contemplation of their oppressed and injured state."

These sentiments were written in 1798, and show that even so soon after its publication a wise man could recognise the greatness of the book. For, with all its faults, it is a work that any age might be proud to produce. It is full of thought—not only the impulsive thought of a warm-hearted woman, but the clear vision of an excellent brain. Most of Mary's dreams have been fulfilled now, and none of them would seem unduly ambitious in the correspondence column of a penny picture paper. But at the time she uttered them, they were momentous and revolutionary. A few other writers had whispered in the wilderness that women had souls and minds as well as bodies, but no one had shouted it in a voice that by its very clearness and courage demanded attention. No one had thought out the problem so thoroughly, or had displayed the artificiality of the age with so sure and revealing a hand. There

is prophecy in the book, too, and all through women's struggles for equal privileges, one can see the little banner of Mary Wollstonecraft fluttering on ahead down the years. The suffragists at street corners handing out their leaflets to scoffing passers-by, suffering in Holloway for a cause that was spat on and reviled ; women in the Great War lifting the burdens that the fighting men had dropped : not one of them has caught up or passed young Mary Wollstonecraft feverishly writing her book in the shabby room in George Street.

CHAPTER SIX

Mr. Fuseli and Louis XVI

THE publication of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* changed Mary from an inconspicuous literary hack into a prominent woman of letters. It also made her "Mrs. Wollstonecraft." The book created an immense sensation, and was quickly translated into French and German. As stated in the previous chapter, many people were shocked by its plain-spokenness, and by the unconventional warmth with which it was written. To the conservative and puritanical, it was an offence against all decency and womanly reserve, and its author was viciously denounced. Hannah More wrote to Horace Walpole that she was being much pestered to read it, but was invincibly resolved not to do so. Said she :

"Of all jargon, I hate metaphysical jargon ; besides, there is something fantastic and absurd in the very title. How many ways there are of being ridiculous ! I am sure I

have as much liberty as I can make a good use of, now I am an old maid ; and when I was a young one I had, I dare say, more than was good for me. If I were still young, perhaps I should not make this confession ; but so many women are fond of government, I suppose, because they are not fit for it. To be unstable and capricious, I really think, is but too characteristic of our sex ; and there is, perhaps, no animal so much indebted to subordination for its good behaviour as woman."

Horace Walpole replied in high commendation of these comfortable sentiments, and a year or two later he wrote again to Hannah More, and thus ended his letter :

" Adieu, thou excellent woman ! thou reverse of that hyena in petticoats, Mrs. Wollstonecraft, who to this day discharges her ink and gall on Marie Antoinette, whose unparalleled sufferings have not yet staunched that Alecto's blazing ferocity."

It is a curious sidelight on the prejudices of the age that the " excellent woman," Hannah More, vigorous denunciator of slavery and patron of many poor children,

should condemn Mary's book without reading it and urge subordination for her sex.

For a time Mary was the chief topic of conversation in social and intellectual circles, and if her book made enemies, it also widened the circle of her friends. She became something of a personage, and Mr. Johnson, the publisher, was greatly in demand to effect introductions to her. Godwin says that most of those who sought her acquaintance expected to find "a rude, pedantic, dictatorial visage; and they were not a little surprised when, instead of all this, they found a woman lovely in her person and, in the best and most engaging sense, feminine in her manner."

Mary was thirty-two years of age when the *Vindication* was published, and her beauty, which had matured slowly through the green and coltish stages, was now at its height. Opie's portrait shows her masses of auburn hair, her clear skin and the hazel eyes which Southey said were the most expressive he had ever seen. The sour-tongued, ungrateful Eliza Bishop wrote to Everina that "Charles informs me too that *Mrs. Wollstonecraft* is grown quite handsome; he adds

likewise that, being conscious she is on the wrong side of thirty, she now endeavours to set off those charms she once despised, to the best advantage." Besides her looks and her brains, Mary had the priceless gift of attracting friends who stood by her through all her misfortunes and never failed in loyalty. Her own nature was of a quality that appealed to and retained the best in others.

In the burst of fame that greeted her book, she received some reward for all her years of work and of unselfish struggle for her thankless family. She was happy, prosperous and loved. There was no longer so much need to help her sisters, and Charles had begun to be independent of her bounty. For the first time she could spend money on herself. She moved from George Street to better rooms in Store Street, Bedford Square, and bought new furniture for them. She devoted more thought to her clothes, and all the sparse habits of her life were filled out and softened. All her life she had been starved of luxuries and had denied herself for the sake of other people. Probably she bought wineglasses now and flowers and a stiff silk gown to wear at Mr. Johnson's house. Also

she entered on a friendship which is a little clouded in mystery.

Among the circle of Mr. Johnson's friends were a Mr. and Mrs. Fuseli. He had been forced by his political opinions to leave Zurich and was a warm supporter of the downtrodden and oppressed. He was an artist, but, like Mary, he did translation for Johnson and contributed to the *Analytical Review*. At this time he was about fifty years of age and working on a series of pictures illustrating Milton. He was a very brilliant talker and loved to find himself leading the conversation of whatever company he was in.

Obviously he was exactly the type of man to appeal to Mary. She approved his political opinions and admired the texture of his mind. The accumulated experience of his twenty additional years was a solid, helpful rock to her own half-developed nature. "I always catch something from the torrent of his conversation worth treasuring up in my memory to exercise my understanding." Thus she wrote of him, and one can picture the eager disciple listening with greedy interest to the wisdom of the middle-

aged exile. Fuseli talking a roomful of people into awed silence, stunning them with the force of his brilliance, and Mary's parted lips and shining brown eyes as she sat near him and sometimes—for she was an irrepressible talker, too—trying to squeeze her voice into his brief pauses. A warm friendship united them.

It is over the degree of warmth that the chronicle argues. Knowles, biographer of Fuseli, says definitely that Mary was in love with the artist, and he quotes letters to prove his contention. C. Kegan Paul, biographer of William Godwin, and a whole-hearted defender of Mary's memory, calls this a "preposterous story," and says that he fails to find any confirmation of it. Godwin himself, writing soon after Mary's death, deals with the subject in passages which are significant enough to deserve quotation :

"Notwithstanding the unequality of their years, Mary was not of a temper to live upon terms of so much intimacy with a man of merit and genius without loving him. The delight she enjoyed in his society she transferred by association to his person. What she experienced in this respect was no doubt

heightened by the state of celibacy and restraint in which she had hitherto lived, and to which the rules of polished society condemns an unmarried woman. She conceived a personal and ardent affection for him. Mr. Fuseli was a married man, and his wife the acquaintance of Mary. She readily perceived the restrictions which this circumstance seemed to impose upon her ; but she made light of any difficulty that might arise out of them. . . . There is no reason to doubt that if Mr. Fuseli had been disengaged at the period of their acquaintance, he would have been the man of her choice."

And then again, in reference to her visit to Paris :—

" One of her principal inducements to this step related, I believe, to Mr. Fuseli. She had at first considered it as reasonable and judicious to cultivate what I may be permitted to call a platonic affection for him, but she did not, in the sequel, find all the satisfaction in this plan which she had originally expected from it. It was in vain that she enjoyed much pleasure in his society, and that she enjoyed it frequently. Her ardent imagination was continually conjuring up

pictures of the happiness she should have found if fortune had favoured their more intimate union. She felt herself formed for domestic affection, and all those tender charities which men of sensibility have constantly treated as the dearest bond of human society. General conversation and society could not satisfy her. She felt herself alone, as it were, in the great mass of her species, and she repined when she reflected that the best years of her life were spent in this comfortless solitude. These ideas made the cordial intercourse of Mr. Fuseli, which had at first been one of her greatest pleasures, a source of perpetual torment to her. She conceived it necessary to snap the chain of this association in her mind, and for that purpose determined to seek a new climate, and mingle in different scenes."

That certainly sounds definite enough. Mr. Kegan Paul discredits it by saying that Godwin knew extremely little of Mary's earlier life and had not questioned her on the subject. On the other hand, it does not seem likely that Godwin, writing as her widower, would be so positive about this attachment if there was any room for doubt.

Also, he was acquainted with Fuseli and watched the affair through its short and hopeless course.

It is probable, then, that Mary fell in love with Fuseli, but there is no evidence that her affection was returned. It was a cruel blow of fate that the first romance of her life should be so futile. She met it with courage, and not even her enemies could find in it any shadow of dishonour. Mrs. Fuseli still remained her friend. Mary endured for as long as she could the suffering and hunger of a thin intellectual friendship with the man whom she loved with passion, and then packed up her belongings and went to France. The only fruit borne by the episode is Browning's poem, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli."

Paris, torn and furious with revolution, was then the mecca for the intellectual hotheads of England. Across the Channel, French royalist refugees hurried to quiet shores, passing on the way adventurers eager for a closer view of this strange, eventful history. Mary Wollstonecraft, travelling alone, reached Paris in December, 1792, the same month that young William

Wordsworth left it. Thomas Paine was living near the Rue de Richelieu.

After the storms of the autumn the city in December had sunk into a lull. In August the mob had broken into the Tuileries and captured the royal family. In September the royalist prisoners who crowded the gaols had been massacred. Pitt had withdrawn the British Minister from Paris and was striving not to hear the demands of his people that England should go to war against the murderers of France. The Girondists were in power and Louis XVI was preparing for his trial.

Mary knew in Paris a Monsieur and Madame Filiettaz, and to their house she went when she reached the city. They were away from home, and so she had only the servants for company. She spent her time studying French, and worked so hard that, as she wrote to Everina on Christmas Eve, "I never go to bed without a headache and my spirits are fatigued with endeavouring to form a just opinion of public affairs."

On December 26th Louis was tried, and from her window Mary watched him pass by on the way to hear his death sentence.

She spent the day anxiously waiting in dread of an outbreak among the people and weeping tears of pity for the tragedy of the King. Mary, "the hyena in petticoats" of Walpole's acid fancy, who had spat her indignation against Burke's defence of the French monarchs, sat, miserable and lonely, all through that dark December day, full of fears for the future and mourning for the past. In the evening, just before bedtime, she wrote to Mr. Johnson a letter in which one can hear the ominous quietness of that day and see the leaping shadows in the room where Mary sat in the candlelight.

PARIS, *December 26th*, 1792.

"I should, immediately on the receipt of your letter, my dear friend, have thanked you for your punctuality, for it highly gratified me, had I not wished to wait till I could tell you that this day was not stained with blood. Indeed the prudent precautions taken by the National Convention to prevent a tumult made me suppose that the dogs of faction would not dare to bark, much less to bite, however true to their scent; and I was not mistaken, for

the citizens, who were all called out, are returning home with composed countenances, shouldering their arms. About nine o'clock this morning the King passed by my window, moving silently along, excepting now and then a few strokes on the drum, which rendered the stillness more awful, through empty streets, surrounded by the National Guards, who, clustering round the carriage, seemed to deserve their name. The inhabitants flocked to their windows, but the casements were all shut ; not a voice was heard, nor did I see anything like an insulting gesture. For the first time since I entered France I bowed to the majesty of the people, and respected the propriety of behaviour, so perfectly in unison with my own feelings. I can scarcely tell you why, but an association of ideas made the tears flow insensibly from my eyes when I saw Louis sitting, with more dignity than I expected from his character, in a hackney-coach, going to meet death where so many of his race have triumphed. My fancy instantly brought Louis XIV before me, entering the capital with all his pomp,

after one of the victories most flattering to his pride, only to see the sunshine of prosperity overshadowed by the sublime gloom of misery. I have been alone ever since ; and though my mind is calm, I cannot dismiss the lively images that have filled my imagination all the day. Nay, do not smile, but pity me, for once or twice, lifting my eyes from the paper, I have seen eyes glare through a glass door opposite my chair, and bloody hands shook at me. Not the distant sound of a footstep can I hear. My apartments are remote from those of the servants, the only persons who sleep with me in an immense hotel, one folding door opening after another. I wish I had kept the cat with me ! I want to see something alive—death in so many frightful shapes has taken hold of my fancy. I am going to bed, and for the first time in my life I cannot put out the candle.

" M.W."

The society of her friends in Paris helped to steady Mary's nerves and give her relief from the horrors that surrounded her.

Thomas Paine was glad to welcome her to his house and, as he was a member of the National Convention, he was able to introduce her to such Republican leaders as Condorcet, Brisson and Madame Roland. She was also friendly with Helen Maria Williams, a poetess of extremely Liberal views. "Miss Williams has behaved very civilly to me," wrote Mary to Everina, "and I shall visit her frequently because I *rather* like her, and I meet French company at her house. Her manners are affected, yet the simple goodness of her heart continually breaks through the varnish, so that one would be more inclined, at least I should, to love than admire her." Another friend was Mrs. Christie, whose house was a meeting place for Americans. Among these was Captain Gilbert Imlay.

Louis XVI was executed on Jaunary 21st, 1793, and the indignation of England smothered Pitt's hopes of peace. In February France made her declaration of war against the English.

Early in the New Year, Mary left the mansion of Madame Filiettaz and moved to Neuilly, three miles outside the city. The

war between the two countries had cut her off entirely from her friends at home. She could neither write to her sisters nor hear from them, and for eighteen months the letter to Mr. Johnson was the last tidings of her. This meant that she could not draw any money from England, and the supply she had brought was running very short. Life at Neuilly was an economy even more rigid than that of the early days in George Street. She lived in a solitary house, with an old French gardener for her sole attendant. Naturally, being Mary Wollstonecraft, she found, even in this solitude, a warm and faithful friend. The old gardener gave her a service that was tender with devotion. He waited on her in every way in his power, and saved the best fruits of his labours for her table. He was a garrulous companion in her loneliness and a real protector against the terrors of that time. Mary, in those soft spring days, loved to wander alone in the forests of Neuilly, watching the swollen buds, and listening to the birds whistling from tree to tree in rainless twilights. To this habit her old friend strongly objected. He was not used to the Englishwoman's independent

ways, and he had a bloodcurdling assortment of stories of robbers haunting the woods and attacking the unprotected. When Mary reached home each evening, with her boughs of catkin or a tight bunch of gentle primroses, she would find the gardener peering with anxious eyes through the gloom and his tongue tripping in the eagerness of his expostulation. Sometimes to please him she walked into Paris instead. One day when she was there she passed a place of execution with blood still wet on the pavement, and the crowd of lookers-on discussing the spectacle. Mary was so loud in her pity and horror that a bystander warned her to keep silent, and hurried her away from the dangers of outspokenness. She was thankful then for the tranquil peace of Neuilly, even with the bogey shadows of the old man's robbers.

While she lived at Neuilly, Mary began to write *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution, and the Effect it has produced in Europe.* This was probably finished at Havre many months later, and it was published by Johnson in 1794. But this placid time at Neuilly is the period of her life when one can most easily

pause and consider the book. By the time she reaches Havre, Mary's prospects are much more complicated. So it is among the birch trees and primroses of Neuilly that we stop and read it.

Mary had intended to set down her views of the Revolution in the form of a series of letters, but she decided that this medium was too slight for the weight of the matter, and began the task all over again. The *Historical and Moral View* is now forgotten, but it is worthy of the attention of the student of that period. It made a great success when it was published, and one admirer in a burst of enthusiasm, declared it the equal of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. A more practical testimony is the fact that it went rapidly through two editions.

In literary style the book is vastly superior to the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Most of the "turgid bombast" has really been left out and the "flowery diction" vigorously pruned. It is vigorous, forceful and shrewd in its judgments. Mary had intended to complete the work in three or four volumes, but unfortunately only one was finished. This, short and fragmentary

as it is, is a valuable contribution to the history of the time. Certainly it deserves to stand on the shelf beside the more portentous work of Carlyle.

The book takes the history of the Revolution to the time of the King's removal to Paris, and includes excellent accounts of the siege of the Bastille and the women's march to Versailles. Like her reply to Burke's *Reflections*, this work is rigid with Mary's hatred of the cruelty of courts and the tyranny of Kings over commoners. She has hard words to say of Marie Antoinette, "discharging ink and gall," as Horace Walpole wrote in the letter to Hannah More, already quoted.

"The unfortunate Queen of France, beside the advantages of birth and station, possessed a very fine person; and her lovely face, sparkling with vivacity, hid the want of intelligence. Her complexion was dazzlingly clear, and when she was pleased her manners were bewitching, for she happily mingled the most insinuating voluptuous softness and affability with an air of grandeur bordering on pride, that rendered the contrast more striking. Independence also of

whatever kind always gives a degree of dignity to the mien ; so that monarchs and nobles with most ignoble souls, from believing themselves superior to others, have actually acquired a look of superiority.

" But her opening faculties were poisoned in the bud ; for before she came to Paris she had already been prepared, by a corrupt, subtle abbé, for the part she was to play ; and, young as she was, became so deeply attached to the aggrandisements of her house that, though plunged deep in pleasure, she never omitted sending immense sums to her brother on every occasion. The person of the King, in itself very disgusting, was rendered more so by gluttony, and a total disregard of delicacy, and even decency, in his apartments, and when jealous of the Queen, for whom he had a kind of devouring passion he treated her with great brutality, till she acquired sufficient *finesse* to subjugate him. Is it then surprising that a very desirable woman, with a sanguine constitution, should shrink, abhorrent, from his embraces ; or that an empty mind should be employed only to vary the pleasures which emasculated her Circean court ? "

In spite of this, Mary was, above all things, fair-minded, and she cared little more for the new rule than she had done for the old. The brutality sickened her, and she is hot in her denunciation of the wanton shedding of blood and the lawlessness of the rabble that marched to Versailles. Near the end of the book there is a fine passage in which she admits this and strives to find a reason for it.

"The only excuse that can be made for the ferocity of the Parisians is then simply to observe that they had not any confidence in the laws, which they had always found to be merely cobwebs to catch small flies. Accustomed to be punished themselves for every trifle, and often for only being in the way of the rich, or their parasites; when, in fact, had the Parisians seen the execution of a noble or priest, though convicted of crimes beyond the daring of vulgar minds? When justice, or the law, is so partial, the day of retribution will come with the red sky of vengeance, to confound the innocent with the guilty. The mob were barbarous beyond the tiger's cruelty: for how could they trust a Court that had so often deceived them, or

expect to see its agents punished when the same measures were pursuing ? "

Any historian might be well pleased to be remembered by a passage of this quality and keenness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Captain Gilbert Imlay

SPRING mellowed in the woods of Neuilly and wild hyacinths filled the hollows with their smoky, innocent blue. The old gardener hovered about the table whereon he had laid Mary's frugal supper, and wondered when he would see her coming home through the radiant sunset to eat it. Perhaps he wondered why she came back flushed and smiling now, and was absent-minded when he talked of the evil ways of robbers. More probably, being a wise old man and gallant in his time, he knew that Mary's interest in flowers and solitary meditation had taken a second place to the joy of meeting her lover at the barrier between the city and Neuilly.

Captain Gilbert Imlay was an American born in New Jersey about the year 1755. He had gained his captaincy during the American War of Independence, and in 1792 published a book called *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North*

America. He was in the timber business, trading with Norway and Sweden, and having his headquarters at Havre. Not very much is known about his life before it touched Mary's, but he was evidently a man of substantial means and of an attractive personality.

Mary first met him at the house of Mrs. Christie, and at that time she did not like him. This is a fairly common prelude to love. Imlay himself was greatly attracted to Mary, and set about with much skill and expedition to wear down her prejudice and then capture her heart. Every circumstance was in his favour. Mary was lonely at Neuilly and eager to seize on the relief of companionship more congenial than that of the kindly old gardener. Her affection for Fuseli had died away, leaving a gap that ached for another interest. This first experience of frustrated passion left her conscious of herself and her lovelessness in a way that her unawakened years had never known. There was no home influence to check or disturb her, and no one to whom she could go for advice. Captain Gilbert Imlay broke through her solitude in the green, sappy woods and told her the first love story

she had ever heard. She forgot her pride then and her first instinctive dislike of him. She was no longer Mrs. Wollstonecraft, unflinching vindicator of the rights of women. She was Mary, talking of love under the benign shelter of the beech-trees and returning home at night with her auburn hair tumbled and her eyes full of bliss.

She was not a woman who gives in half measure, and by April she and Imlay were lovers in the deepest sense of the word. Morals were topsy-turvy in France just then. People snatched at the present for fear that there would be no future, and the government had set an example for forms and ceremonies. Mary would never seek for happiness against her conscience, and one can only suppose that in this relationship with Imlay conscience had no objection to offer.

From April till August they lived in separate houses and kept their intimacy a secret. In June Mary wrote him the first of those *Letters to Imlay* which were published by William Godwin and then by C. Kegan Paul. Godwin described them as "the offspring of a glowing imagination, and a heart penetrated with the passion it essays

to describe." They are extraordinarily expressive of the beauty of Mary's nature and of the unrestrained wealth of affection that she poured out on her lover. Even the stilted epistolatry language of the period is no cloak for the warmth within. They tell the story of this love affair so well, reflecting every subtle light and shade in it, that they are worth plentiful quotation. Mr. Kegan Paul's edition of them was published in 1879.

The first letter, dated in June, is mainly significant as opening the series :—

> " My Dear Love,—After making my arrangements for our snug dinner to-day, I have been taken by storm and obliged to promise to dine, at an early hour, with the Miss ——'s, the only day they intend to pass here. I shall, however, leave the key in the door, and hope to find you at my fireside when I return, about eight o'clock. Will you not wait for poor Joan ? whom you will find better, and till then think very affectionately of her.
>
> " Yours truly, " Mary."
>
> " I am sitting down to dinner ; so do not send an answer."

In August, a month after the execution of Charlotte Corday, Mary moved to Paris and lived there openly with Imlay as his wife. She was indeed registered at the American Embassy as Mrs. Imlay, but no marriage ceremony had taken place. It is easy to find a number of reasons for this notable omission. In the first instance, France was at war with England and the safety of the English people in Paris lay in keeping themselves inconspicuous. Mary would have had to declare her nationality before she could be married, and this would have exposed her to considerable risks. Also with France in her present state of chaos it would have been difficult for foreigners to go through any ceremony which would be valid in England. Godwin says that Mary did not wish to marry Imlay because of her own family obligations, for she was reluctant to "involve him in certain family embarrassments to which she conceived herself exposed, or make him answerable for the pecuniary demands that existed against her." Her most ardent defenders say that an additional reason was Mary's dislike of marriage as typified by the ménages of the Wollstone-

crafts, Bloods, Skeys and Bishops, but she was too sensible a woman to condemn an institution because of a few bad examples, and it is probable that the problems of nationality were the main cause of what the righteous would describe as a " life of sin."

The most certain thing of all is that Mary regarded herself as Imlay's wife, and had made in her heart vows of fidelity and unchanging love that were to her as binding as any spoken in church. Love was the first law, more unbreakable than any formal tie. No bride set about with orange blossom and " The voice that breathed o'er Eden " could have a keener sense of sanctity than Mary, unmarried wife of Imlay, moving her few belongings to the new home in Paris. Mr. Kegan Paul's comment has a hint of the ultimate tragedy of her trust :

" No one can read her letters without seeing that she was a pure, high-minded, and refined woman, and that she considered herself, in the eyes of God and man, Imlay's wife. Religious as she was and with a strong moral sense, she yet made the grand mistake of supposing that it is possible for one woman to undo the consecrated custom

of ages, to set herself in opposition to the course of society and not be crushed by it. And she made the no less fatal mistake of judging Imlay by her own standard and thinking that he was as true, as impassioned, as self-denying as herself."

Mary's friends in England were still completely in the dark as to her movements, and the first intimation that her sisters had of the change in her life came in a letter from Charles Wollstonecraft, now settled in America. This was dated June 16th, 1794, a year after the meetings at Neuilly, and said : "I heard from Mary six months ago by a gentleman who knew her at Paris, and since that have been informed she is married to Captain Imlay of this country."

Life in Paris began very happily. The English and Americans there must have known of Mary's ambiguous position, but as they did not let it affect their friendship with her, they must also have realised the difficulties that caused it. Imlay himself was all that Mary's tender heart could hope for. He was deeply in love with her, and she was already so clearly aware of his faults that she was not shocked or disappointed by them.

She was clear-sighted even in love, and though she realised his coarseness of mind and the disquieting fickleness of his fancy, she forgave them because he loved much and was kind to her. She who had spent her life serving others found it a wonderful and sweet experience to be the sole object of a man's care.

August slipped by in a radiance of blistering hot days. The Revolution took an ugly turn and the Law of the Suspect was passed in September. English troops were fighting in Flanders, and a young Corsican artillery officer named Bonaparte was making a name for himself in the French army. In August Marie Antoinette, whitehaired and worn with grief, was taken from the Temple to the ignominious cell at the Conciergerie, where she sat and waited for her execution two months later.

In September Imlay went to Havre—at that time called Havre Marat—on business, leaving Mary in Paris. He was detained there for several months and she filled in some of the lonely hours in writing long letters to him. They are full of the intimate details of her life and shining with love for

him. She would not put his slippers from their customary place by the door, " though they are not the handsomest of their kind." She saves a parcel of books so that they may read them together, and gives him accounts of the letters that arrive from other people. In November she told him of her coming motherhood. " This thought has not only produced an overflowing tenderness to you, but made me very attentive to calm my mind and take exercise, lest I should destroy an object, in whom we are to have a mutual interest, you know."

From this time onwards the surface of her mind, never very equable, was disturbed by the frets of her physical condition. Sometimes she writes of ill-health and sometimes of mental depression. Imlay seems to be away for a long time and to write infrequently ; she does not believe that the amount of money he is making will justify the cruel separation. She is oppressed with the cares of imminent motherhood and always afraid of some mischance befalling the unborn child. Imlay, absorbed in his business at Havre, seemed so out of touch with her worries : " . . . Considering the care and

anxiety a woman must have about a child before it comes into the world, it seems to me, *by a natural right*, to belong to her. When men get immersed in the world, they seem to lose all sensations, excepting those necessary to continue or produce life! Are these the privileges of reason? Amongst the feathered race, whilst the hen keeps the young warm, her mate stays by to cheer her, but it is sufficient for man to condescend to get a child, in order to claim it. A man is a tyrant!

"You may now tell me that, if it were not for me, you would be laughing away with some honest fellows in London. The casual exercise of social sympathy would not be sufficient for me—I should not think such a heartless life worth preserving. It is necessary to be in good humour with you to be pleased with the world."

A kind letter from Imlay was enough to raise Mary's fallen spirits and ease her heart again:

"I did not receive your letter till I came home; and I did not expect it, for the post came in much later than usual. It was a cordial to me and I wanted one. . . .

"There was so much considerate tenderness in your epistle to-night, that, if it has not made you dearer to me, it has made me forcibly feel how very dear you are to me, by charming away half my cares."

Sometimes the absent Imlay reproved Mary for her fears and for the morbid strain that made her so easily depressed. He made business anxieties his excuse for apparent neglect of her, and early in the New Year of 1794 began to urge that she should join him in Havre. One day he sent her a glowing description of their future life together, of quiet evenings by the fireside, with children clinging about their knees. Six children was the number that he in his enthusiasm specified, and poor Mary, walking the shadowed ways of the expectant mother, agreed with rapture to this happy vision.

In February she set off for Havre. Paris was a better place then to leave than it was to live in. The Terror had reached its shrillest point of blood-lust and ghastliness. The Goddess of Reason reigned, and drunken, half-naked women danced the *Carmagnole* in the churches and streets. All day long the guillotine clanged in the Place de la

Révolution. Mary was glad to leave a city so rank with horrors. Havre was comparatively peaceful and a pleasant town of winding, cobbled streets, though Mary considered both its houses and its people to be exceedingly ugly.

As bad luck would have it, Imlay was forced to visit Paris a fortnight after their re-union. But by the end of March he was back again in Havre and the two were not parted again till August.

On May 12th their little daughter was born. She was named Fanny after the dear friend of Mary's girlhood. Mary was so well at this time that she stayed in bed only one day after the birth, and in a week was out in the bright spring sunshine again.

The summer passed in a blaze of happiness. Imlay was at his best then—charming, affectionate, full of pride in his wife and baby. Mary was a devoted mother, and found in Fanny a bliss that she would not have imagined possible. They lived in a small house in the town, and Mary used to take the baby down to the tarred and salty quays to listen to the boom of the sea beyond the

harbour and the melancholy cries of the gulls. She made friends in the place, who gave her companionship when the beloved Imlay was engrossed in his business concerns. The only trouble at this time was caused by the attack of smallpox suffered by little Fanny. Smallpox was a terrible scourge in those days, and Mary must have had several anguished days before her good nursing saved the baby's life.

But these happy weeks of quiet domesticity ended in August, when Captain Imlay went to Paris and left an aching void in Mary's life. Her letters at this period are much happier than those of the separation in August, for had she not Fanny, her burbling, toothless infant, left to her for comfort?

"I write in a hurry because the little one, who has been sleeping a long time, begins to call for me. Poor thing! when I am sad, I lament that all my affections grow on me, till they become too strong for my peace, though they afford me snatches of exquisite enjoyment. This for our little girl was at first very reasonable—more the effect of reason, a sense of duty, than feeling—now she has got into my heart and imagination,

and when I walk out without her, her little figure is ever dancing before me.

"You too have somehow clung round my heart. I found I could not eat my dinner in the great room, and when I took up the large knife to carve for myself, tears rushed into my eyes. Do not, however, suppose that I am melancholy, for, when you are from me, I not only wonder how I can find fault with you. but how I can doubt your affection."

In September Mary and Fanny followed him to Paris. The city had been through many phases since Mary left it seven months before. In April Danton and Camille Desmoulins had been executed ; on the 28th of July Robespierre, half-unconscious with the pain of his shattered jaw, was dragged in the tumbril through a yelling crowd. The Reign of Terror had ended. Even the fashions of dress were different. Red caps disappeared, and the streets were full of dandyfied young men, the *Jeunesse Dorée*, ready to forget the thousands of lives that had been butchered in their country and the innocent blood scarcely washed away from the roads they airily trod.

After a week or two Mary was alone again. The passion for money-making had beckoned Imlay to London and the love of a devoted woman was not enough to detain him. He kissed the cheerful, indifferent Fanny, and Mary, disappointed to pain at the shortness of their reunion, and promised to see them both very soon and never to let the thought of them slip out of his heart. So he went to England, and as Mary watched him drive away from their home, she did not know that it was the last time she would ever look at him without the agony of mistrust. By their next meeting he had broken all the vows he had made to her and his love had turned to dishonour.

Communication with England was easier now and Mary could always find a friend who would carry her letters over for her. She was able to get in touch with her sisters again and had sent them glowing descriptions of Imlay, whom she described as "a most worthy man, who joins to uncommon kindness of heart and quickness of feeling, a soundness of understanding and reasonableness rarely to be met with." In a letter to Everina, written from Paris in September,

she says of Fanny, then over four months old :

" I want you to see my little girl, who is more like a boy. She is ready to fly away with spirits, and has eloquent health in her cheeks and eyes. She does not promise to be a beauty, but appears wonderfully intelligent, and though I am sure she has her father's quick temper and feelings, her good humour runs away with all the credit of my good nursing."

Fanny is the heroine of all the letters that Mary sent to the absent father that autumn in Paris. They are full, too, of the expressions of her own love for him and of details of the small events of her days. But it is Fanny's name that flowers through the pages as persistently as daisies growing on a lawn. Between September and Christmas there are constant allusions to her, the sweetest thing in Mary's life and the closest tie between her and Imlay, busy making money in England.

" You will want to be told, over and over again, that our little Hercules is quite recovered. Besides looking at me, there are three other things which delight her ; to

ride in a coach, to look at a scarlet waistcoat, and hear loud music—yesterday at the *fête* she enjoyed the two latter ; but, to honour J. J. Rousseau, I intend to give her a sash, the first she has ever had round her—and why not ?—for I have always been half in love with him. . . . I have been playing and laughing with the little girl so long that I cannot take up my pen to address you without emotion. Pressing her to my bosom she looked so like you (*entre nous*, your best looks, for I do not admire your commercial face), every nerve seemed to vibrate to the touch. . . . I still continue to be almost a slave to the child. She indeed rewards me, for she is a sweet little creature ; for, setting aside a mother's fondness (which, by the bye, is growing on me, her little intelligent smiles sinking into my heart), she has an astonishing degree of sensibility and observation. The other day by B——'s child, a fine one, she looked like a little sprite. She is all eyes, life and motion, and her eyes are not the eyes of a fool, I will swear. . . . And this said little girl, our darling, is become a most intelligent little creature, and as gay as a lark, and that in the morning too,

which I do not find quite so convenient. I once told you that the sensations before she was born and when she is sucking were pleasant ; but they do not deserve to be compared to the emotions I feel when she stops to smile upon me, or laughs outright on meeting me unexpectedly in the street, or after a short absence."

Mary, in her mother-love, was as impetuous and whole hearted as in the passion she gave to the undeserving Imlay in the woods at Neuilly.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Thames at Putney

AS winter turned towards the new year of 1795, Mary's loneliness began to be haunted with fears. Paris, even after the Terror had ended, was not a comfortable city for an unprotected woman and child. "I almost fear," wrote Mary, "the last flap of the tail of the beast."

But she had other reasons for melancholy, and these hurt and fret her infinitely more than the political unrest of France. Imlay, absorbed in his business, seemed to be forgetting her. His letters were short and cold and came with long intervals between them. She had little sympathy with his passion for money, especially when it meant separation. She had faced poverty and learned the worst of it, and even that did not seem to her so unbearable as constant parting and the first gnawing pain of doubt. In December she sent a letter which hinted at rebellion :

" . . . Why cannot you be content with the object you had first in view when you entered into this wearisome labyrinth? I know very well that you have imperceptibly been drawn on; yet why does one project, successful or abortive, only give place to two others? Is it not sufficient to avoid poverty? I am contented to do my part; and even here, sufficient to escape from wretchedness is not difficult to obtain. And, let me tell you, I have my project also, and if you do not soon return, the little girl and I will take care of ourselves; we will not accept any of your cold kindness—your distant civilities—no; not we."

This, she added, was written in jest, but it is a jest born out of bitterness. In those dreary winter months, Mary came to the first realisation of her precarious position as the unmarried wife of a volatile man. She had nothing but Imlay's word to protect herself and the baby from desertion and dishonour, and her faith in that word, once so overwhelmingly pure and strong, had begun to flicker in the chill wind of her uneasiness. She was torn between her love for him and the pride that urged the impossibility of

maintaining a relationship of which he had grown weary. Pathetically each letter tells him of her ability to earn her own living in independence. Each letter, too, dwells on the budding sweetness of Fanny, as though in an effort to tempt the father to return and see it for himself.

In the middle of January the darkness lifted a little. Imlay sent a kind letter, and " It is pleasant to forgive those we love," Mary wrote back to him. The shortage of fuel had given her a heavy cold, but Fanny was well and had two teeth, and with Imlay's affection restored, the world looked pleasant again.

In a few days depression closed round her once more. The letters from England were looked for through many weary days, and when they came proved to be only perfunctory notes that had no comfort for an unhappy woman. The torture of waiting for letters that in the end bring disappointment is one of the keenest that afflict a heart in love. In Mary's case, ill-health lowered her resistance to the bludgeonings of fate. The cold settled on her lungs, and she imagined herself to be dying of consumption.

She had few friends to whom she could turn, and pride made her shrink from people who knew of Imlay's neglect and drew their own malicious conclusions from it. Her letters at this time are the cry of a soul that is utterly crushed and wounded :

" This has been such a period of barbarity and misery I ought not to complain of having my share. I wish one moment that I had never heard of the cruelties that have been practised here, and the next envy the mothers who have been killed with their children. Surely I had suffered enough in life, not to be cursed with a fondness that burns up the vital stream I am imparting. You will think me mad : I would I were so, that I could forget my misery—so that my head or heart would be still."

Another letter answers his excuses that money is the sole reason for his neglect :

" When I determined to live with you, I was only governed by affection. I would share poverty with you, but I turn with affright from the sea of trouble on which you are entering. I have certain principles of action ; I know what I look for to found my happiness on. It is not money. With you

I wished for sufficient to procure the comforts of life, as it is, less will do. I can still exert myself to obtain the necessaries of life for my child, and she does not want more at present. I have two or three plans in my head to earn our subsistence ; for do not suppose that, neglected by you, I will lie under obligations of a pecuniary kind to you ! No ; I would sooner submit to menial service. I wanted the support of your affection ; that gone, all is over ! "

The dignity and restraint with which Mary bore her suffering is not less noticeable than the suffering itself and the anguish of love behind it.

At last Imlay sent for Mary and Fanny to join him in England. With a sudden rising of hope, Mary wound up her affairs in Paris and started off, breaking the journey at Havre, the birthplace of Fanny, and the scene of the happy days of last summer. "I sit, lost in thought, looking at the sea," she wrote to Imlay, " and tears rush to my eyes when I find that I am cherishing any fond expectations." But hope, once started, grows apace, and in Havre every familiar sight spoke of Imlay's tenderness a year ago.

Her sore mind was comforted by a thousand gentle memories and happiness came suddenly within her reach again. When Imlay saw her and the charming Fanny, surely his love would rise above the sordid grip of avarice. All would be well once more when they were united.

They crossed the sea to Brighton, reaching there on April 11th, and Mary wrote a short, excited note to Imlay assuring him that they would be with him the next day. Between that letter and the next one, dated May 22nd, there stretches a wide chasm of disillusion and tragedy.

Radiant with her new hopes, full of pride in her cheerful baby, Mary journeyed by coach from Brighton to London and sought out Imlay's lodging. She expected a warm welcome after the separation of seven months and an amazed interest in the progress made by Fanny. But Imlay received her coldly and seemed already to have regretted that he ever sent for her. He was very busy, he said, and had little time to spare from his financial concerns. He had taken a furnished house for her and was anxious that she should have every comfort. But the

comfort of his presence and love was denied to her.

The excuse of business was a cover for a much deeper wrong. While Mary was in Paris he had formed an attachment for a young strolling actress who seemed to his fickle fancy more desirable than the woman who had loved him for two years and borne him a child. When Mary discovered this, her stunned brain was unable to fight against the shock and she decided to commit suicide. How she proposed to do this is not known. She wrote a number of farewell letters and made all her plans for death. At the last moment Imlay discovered her intention and stopped her. Even Godwin has no more information to give on a matter that is curiously obscure. He says: "I only know that Mr. Imlay became acquainted with her purpose at a moment when he was uncertain whether or not it was already executed, and that his feelings were roused by the intelligence. It was, perhaps, owing to his activity and representations that her life was at this time saved."

This event quickened Imlay's dormant sense of responsibility. It was obvious that

something must be done to avoid a tragedy which he might not be in time to prevent. On May 22nd, Mary sent him a very kind and tolerant letter, in which she implored him to make up his mind about their future. If they were to continue their relationship, it could only be on a basis of complete confidence. She herself had lost the power of happiness and he must think first of his own good. "My friend—my dear friend," she wrote, "examine yourself well. I am out of the question; for, alas! I am nothing, and discover what you wish to do—what will render you most comfortable—or, to be more explicit, whether you desire to live with me, or part for ever! When you can once ascertain it, tell me frankly, I conjure you! for, believe me, I have very involuntarily interrupted your peace."

Fate discovered an easy way out for Imlay. His business in Norway and Sweden had reached a crisis that necessitated a visit from either himself or a trustworthy agent. It seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to push into the comfortable future the problem of Mary and Fanny. A document was drawn up describing her as "Mary Imlay," and

expressing his complete confidence in her power to act as his deputy, and at the end of May she left London. Imlay bade her farewell with immense thankfulness for the relief that her absence would bring. He had loved her once, but now he was tired of her. She was beautiful and good, but he was tired of her passion and intensity and of the effort of living up to the standards she set for him. The thought of his obligations oppressed the volatile lightness of his nature and he was glad that, by adding another to these obligations, he could gain temporary relief from the rest.

Mary was proud of the confidence that Imlay placed in her and glad to be of service to him. She took Fanny and a maid as companions and they reached Hull on May 27th, with Mary very tired from the long journey, and Fanny joyfully imitating the enchanting sound of the mailcoach horn. In Hull they were delayed for a month waiting for a boat, and Mary's nerves were sorely frayed with the long inactivity. The one relief was a visit to Beverley, where she had spent a few of the years of her unhappy childhood. There she found several old

friends, still in the houses where she had left them, quietly passing their lives in the small cobbled town, while she had packed every moment with adventure and work. She went to see all the old haunts of the child Mary, surprised to find how memory had exaggerated their dignity.

At last they went on board and through wet eyes Mary watched the spires and squares of Hull smudged into the distance. The boat was one of the foul-smelling, ill-equipped vessels of the time, though larger than usual, and with a very kind-hearted captain. Mary had a cabin for her party. Marguerite, the maid, was ill with sea-sickness for most of the voyage, but Fanny—"gay as a lark," wrote her mother—played with the cabin boy. On June 27th they reached Gothenburg.

The letters written between that time and September 27th are dated from various towns in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Germany. The more impersonal parts of them were afterwards published under the title, *Letters from Sweden, Norway and Denmark*. *Letters to Imlay* include the extracts omitted from that book.

The letters are nearly all unhappiness, as though each new scene was embittered with thoughts of old sorrows. The good air and exercise improved her health, which had been very indifferent when she landed. "The rosy fingers of health already streak my cheeks; and I have seen a physical life in my eyes, after I have been climbing the rocks, that resembled the fond, credulous hopes of youth." At Tonsberg, in Norway, she was obliged to leave Fanny for a month, and the separation caused her great distress. "I arrived here last night," she wrote at the end of it, "and with the most exquisite delight once more pressed my babe to my heart. We shall part no more. You perhaps cannot conceive the pleasure it gave me to see her run about and play alone. Her increasing intelligence attaches me more and more to her. I have promised her that I will fulfil my duty to her, and nothing in future shall make me forget it."

From Hamburg Mary wrote to Imlay a definite entreaty that he would put an end to her suspense and tell her exactly what his intentions were for the future. His letters had been harsh, and she could see in them

only a desire to heave a load off his shoulders. If that were so, let him tell her, once and for always, and she would relieve him of the presence and financial burden of herself and Fanny. She was not, she said, sufficiently humbled to depend on his beneficence.

She reached Dover on October 4th and found a letter, saying that she must decide for herself what she wanted to do. She had little hope of happiness in her own life, but she felt that the welfare of Fanny must be their first consideration. So she wrote back that she was prepared to share a home with him for the sake of the child :

" You say, I must decide for myself. I have decided that it was most for the interest of my little girl, and for my own comfort, little as I expect, for us to live together ; and I even thought you would be glad, some years hence, when the tumult of business was over, to repose in the society of an affectionate friend, and mark the progress of our interesting child, whilst endeavouring to be of use in the circle you at last resolved to rest in ; for you cannot run about for ever. . . . I am labouring to write with calmness ; but the extreme anguish I feel, at landing without

having any friend to receive me, and even to be conscious that the friend whom I most wish to see, will feel a disagreeable sensation at being informed of my arrival, does not come under the description of common misery."

Poor, tragic Mary! Once more an attempt at home life was started. Imlay came up to London and settled down in lodgings with his wife and daughter. It was the most pitiful of all failures. His love was dead, and neither Mary's devotion nor the ingratiating ways of the "interesting child" could stir it into life again. Day after day Mary suffered the humiliation of his indifference, determined to keep up the pretence of a home for Fanny's sake. Although he did not love her, she believed him to be faithful and to be conscious of the duty that he owed to the child and herself.

Then at last even her trust was shattered and with it every last shred of hope. From the gossip of her servants she learned that he was keeping an establishment for another woman. In a frenzy of outraged love, Mary went to this house and found him there.

Unhappiness brought Eliza Bishop to the

borders of insanity, and Mary felt herself scarcely removed from them after the discovery of Imlay's deceit. Nothing in life seemed to weigh against this overwhelming bitterness. Even her love for Fanny proved a frail comfort now. After a night of agony, she sat down to write, with hot, trembling fingers, her farewell to the man who had so ill-used her :

" I write you now on my knees ; imploring you to send my child and the maid with——, to Paris, to be consigned to the care of Madame ——, Rue ——, Section de ——. Should they be removed, —— can give their direction.

" Let the maid have all my clothes without distinction.

" Pray pay the cook her wages, and do not mention the confession which I forced from her ; a little sooner or later is of no consequence. Nothing but my extreme stupidity could have rendered me blind so long. Yet, whilst you assured me that you had no attachment, I thought we might still have lived together.

" I shall make no comments on your conduct or any appeal to the world. Let my

wrongs sleep with me ! Soon, very soon, I shall be at peace. When you receive this, my burning head will be cold.

" I would encounter a thousand deaths, rather than a night like the last. Your treatment has thrown my mind into a state of chaos ; yet I am serene. I go to find comfort, and my only fear is, that my poor body will be insulted by an endeavour to recall my hated existence. But I shall plunge into the Thames, where there is the least chance of my being snatched from the death I seek.

" God bless you ! May you never know by experience what you have made me endure. Should your sensibility ever awake, remorse will find its way to your heart ; and, in the midst of business and sensual pleasure, I shall appear before you, the victim of your deviation from rectitude."

It was a cold November day when Mary set out in search of death, and grey dank fogs hung in mourning folds across her *via dolorosa*. She went first to Battersea Bridge, but there were too many people there who would guess her purpose and frustrate it. So she hired a boat and rowed up the sullen

river to Putney. By this time it was evening and rain fell in torrents. Mary was determined that her second attempt should be successful ; no tragedy seemed so great to her as the burden of life. She decided that if she could get her clothes thoroughly soaked before she went into the river, she would sink the more rapidly, so for half an hour she walked up and down the bridge in the pitiless rain. The last smoky orange lights of sunset faded into gloom. Fog wrapped round the silhouette of houses and the dipping lines of open country. There was no sound but the patter of the rain on the water and the hurried tread of Mary's feet as she paced up and down, to the end of the bridge and back again, with her skirts heavy and clinging about her, and her stunned heart teased with memories. Neuilly—the primroses and budding trees, and Imlay's radiant face as he met her at the barrier : Fanny with smallpox at Havre, wearing her sash in honour of Rousseau, playing with the cabin boy on the Scandinavian boat. Fanny . . . Fanny !

At last her clothes were so sodden with rain that she could scarcely drag herself

along. There was no need to wait any longer. With her mind a jumble of prayers for Imlay, for the deserted baby, for her own poor bewildered soul, she plunged over the the bridge into the dark and shadowed water. There, after a terrible and agonising struggle against the slowness of death, she was picked up by passing watermen and dragged, weeping and reluctant, back to consciousness.

Many months later Mary told William Godwin that she underwent such pain in drowning that though she could have chosen almost any other kind of voluntary death, she could not face the same suffering again.

Thus life had to be faced anew. She went to stay with Mrs. Christie in Finsbury Square, and the kindness of such friends as Mr. Johnson persuaded her to rely on her own courage and make no further attempt at self-destruction. Imlay, in an effort to soothe her, vowed that his attachment for the other woman was only temporary, but he did not offer to abandon her at once and resume his life with Mary. There are a few more letters from Mary to him—the kind of piteous thing that a loving and desperate

woman will write even when she knows that the man does not want her. She refused to take money from him for herself, but said that he might help in the support of Fanny. He agreed to do this, but actually nothing ever came from him, and Mary was left with the support of the child to manage alone. On November 27th he returned the letters she had written to him—"a register of sorrow" Mary described them in her acknowledgment—and a few days later he went to Paris with the woman for whose sake he had deserted one of the finest creatures of the time and his own baby daughter. Mary saw him again once or twice—casual meetings in the presence of others. The last time was in April, 1796, five months after the tragedy at Putney. Then he passed completely out of her life.

CHAPTER NINE

William Godwin

MEANWHILE existence had to be faced, and there was Fanny, nearly two years old now and wholly dependent on her mother. At Imlay's request, Mary continued to use his name. She tried to explain the real state of affairs to her acquaintances, but they found it pleasanter to believe her "Mrs. Imlay" and avoid awkward questions of morals. Her friends gave her a warm welcome back to the circle she had left when she went to Paris, and Mr. Johnson promised that she should have plenty of work. Except for her burden of memories and the chattering presence of Fanny, there was little difference between her life of three years before and that which faced her now.

In 1796 *Letters written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, was published. This book was enthusiastically received by the critics. It is mainly descriptions of scenery and people, laced with

many pungent epigrams from the author's shrewd mind. Here and there are traces of the despondency which oppressed her at the time the *Letters* were written, but for the most part it is keen, lively, and full of witty observation. Mary considered the Scandinavians to be kind-hearted people, but sluggish, indolent and uncultured. They eat too much and lay too little store on cleanliness. For the country they live in she has unbounded admiration. Perhaps she is at her best in the descriptions of pine-covered mountains, cowbells in the distance, the long pale summer twilights, and birds singing through the dawn.

The book has many excellencies and very few faults. At the time of its publication it was successful, and editions quickly appeared in America, Portugal and Germany.

The *Letters* were the last of Mary's writings to be published during her lifetime. Soon after her death Godwin brought out *The Posthumous Works of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*. These consisted of a few unimportant fragments. The most substantial of them is an unfinished novel called *Maria, or, The Wrongs of Women*—a sordid story

in the Zola manner, whose inspiration is obviously the Wollstonecraft household and the unhappy marital experiences of Eliza Bishop. Mary's moral purpose is obvious, but her disagreeable realism made a very unpleasant impression on her readers. Novel writers at that time rarely troubled to be squeamish, but *Maria* carried plainness of speech close to the borders of indecency. Published as it was, posthumously, it made many good people gravely uneasy about Mary's place of habitation in the after-life. The other fragments are much less controversial. They are a little book of *Lessons for Fanny*, *Letters on the Management of Infants*, a *Letter to the French Nation*, an Oriental story called *The Cave of Fancy*, an *Essay on Poetry and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature*, and *Hints* for the second part of the *Rights of Woman*. The extreme catholicity of the list seems to indicate that Mary's slow matured mind was still groping after her lifework when death wrote his inexorable "Finis."

But that is to anticipate. In the spring of 1796 Mary, wounded by Imlay's desertion, but still full of courage, held her head high

and sought to smother her pain in work and interests. One of these interests was William Godwin, aged forty, and the greatest figure in the circle of English philosophic anarchists.

William Godwin was born at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, in 1756. Both his father and grandfather were Independent ministers, and the family life was conducted on the dour rigid lines of the Calvinists. As a child young William distinguished himself by writing sermons on the Last Judgment and delivering them to awed and reluctant schoolmates. At the age of seventeen he went to the Theological College at Hoxton, where he was a laborious reader, endowed, according to Mr. H. N. Brailsford, "with all the virtues save modesty." He left college a Tory and a Sandemanian. The doctrine of Sandeman exceeded in gloom that of Calvin by believing, not that ninety-nine out of a hundred people were damned and one Calvinist saved, but that out of a hundred Calvinists only one would ultimately reach heaven. This unpleasant faith reduced the chances of salvation to one against nearly ten thousand, and seems to be a vain end to the sacrifice at Calvary.

With this small shred of hope for eternity, William left college and became a dissenting minister. He published a book of sermons, which are now forgotten and are probably no loss. By the time he was twenty-seven his views had so far changed that he had become a Whig and an Unitarian, living at Beaconsfield and spending his leisure in the study of French philosophers. He was not a success as a minister. He lacked the "common touch" which such a vocation needs, and his people, asking for bread, were given little but fire and brimstone. This failure and the gradual widening of his opinions, made him decide to adopt literature as a profession.

His first effort was a pamphlet in defence of the Coalition, and this was good enough to bring him before the notice of the Whigs. Then he wrote a ponderous *Life of Chatham*, and three novels, which had a temporary success. He contributed for seven years to the *Annual Register*, and had regular work on Murray's *English Review*. Sheridan, literary agent of the Whigs, wished to engage him as a professional pamphleteer at a fixed salary, but Godwin refused to tie himself down. He was at this time a great admirer of Fox.

While he was still struggling and very poor, Godwin adopted an orphaned second cousin named Thomas Cooper, and was solely responsible for him between the ages of twelve and seventeen. He made Thomas a victim of his educational theories and the two spent most of their days in violent quarrelling. Godwin was hot tempered at this time and had the kind of angular nature with which it is difficult to live in comfort. His principles were high and his life rigorously pure, but his upbringing had given him none of the social graces and softness which make a pleasant adornment for virtue.

In 1786 he met Thomas Holcroft, a leading member of the Corresponding Society and a very lovable man. The two were firm friends until Holcroft's death in 1809. It was under his influence that Godwin finally abandoned the narrow gate of heaven and the yawning mouth of Hell. He became an Agnostic.

The London Corresponding Society had been founded by a Scottish bootmaker, Thomas Hardy. It had 30,000 members in London alone, of whom the most notable were Holcroft, Thomas Paine, Horne Tooke,

and William Blake, the poet. Its original business was parliamentary reform, and it became a focus of discontent and hope for the intellectual rebels of the day. The French Revolution was for years the Society's great interest and passion.

William Godwin attended the Revolutionists' dinners and was one of a small committee which undertook the publication of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* in 1791. This book was burned by the public hangman, and many of those concerned in its publication were tried for high treason. Holcroft was one of them, but the case against him was dropped.

In 1793 Godwin published the chief work of his life, *Political Justice*. It made a great sensation, both among its readers and among the members of a government that was a little aghast at the growing intellectual rebellion of the people. Its sentiments exceeded those of any work in their revolutionary passion, and the only thing that saved it from prosecution was its high price of three guineas. As Pitt remarked in the Privy Council when the subject was being discussed, " A three-guinea book could never

do much harm among those who had not three shillings to spare." But in spite of its cost, four thousand copies were sold. It was written in the classical manner, but was an easier book to digest than many of the heavyweights of the period. "The young and fair," said the author complacently, "did not feel deterred from reading my pages." The thesis of the book is crystallised in the sentence: "The characters of men originate in their external circumstances." Virtue and vice are not innate characteristics, but the result of environment. Instincts do not exist and heredity plays no part in the formation of a man's nature. Improve the circumstances in which every human being lives, and evil will completely disappear from the world. Reason should govern the passions and a man must regard his fellows in the light of their individual worth, not according to the degree of affection he has for them. An article of property should belong to the person who most wants it or to whom the possession of it would be most beneficial. Marriage is immoral because the two people bound together by it are not free to follow the dictates of pure reason.

After the publication of this book Godwin became a personage of importance. He was an oracle, a sage, and *Political Justice* was read by every young man seeing visions of a republic of pure reason built in England's green and pleasant land. A few years later young Percy Bysshe Shelley read it at Eton, and Godwin's doctrines seemed to stab glowing spears through the fairy mists and cobwebs of his brain.

It is strange that the book is now almost completely forgotten, while Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* can be bought without difficulty.

In 1794 *Caleb Williams* appeared. This was much the best of Godwin's novels, and had an excellent story, combining both the romantic and revolutionary movements. A volume of essays called *The Enquirer* was published in the same year.

Godwin first met Mary Wollstonecraft in 1791 at the house of Mr. Johnson. In his *Memoir* he gives an account of the meeting which is worth quoting for the picture it paints of the uncomfortable scene ; with Mary, flushed and a little over-excited by the novelty of fame, talking lustily, shy

Tom Paine crushed into silence, and Godwin angry and argumentative.

" The interview was not fortunate. Mary and myself parted mutually displeased with each other. I had not read her *Rights of Woman*. I had barely looked into her answer to Burke, and been displeased, as literary men are apt to be, with a few offences against grammar and other minute points of composition. I had therefore little curiosity to see Mrs. Wollstonecraft, and a very great curiosity to see Thomas Paine. Paine, in his general habits, is no great talker ; and, though he threw in occasionally some shrewd and striking remarks, the conversation lay principally between me and Mary. I, of consequence, heard her very frequently when I wished to hear Paine.

" We touched on a considerable variety of topics, and particularly on the character and habits of certain eminent men. Mary, as has already been observed, had acquired, in a very blameable degree, the practice of seeing everything on the gloomy side, and bestowing censure with a plentiful hand, where circumstances were in any degree doubtful. I, on the contrary, had a strong propensity

to favourable construction, and particularly where I found unequivocal marks of genius, strongly to incline to the supposition of generous and manly virtue. We ventilated in this way the character of Voltaire and others, who have obtained from some individuals an ardent admiration, while the greater number have treated them with extreme moral severity. Mary was at last provoked to tell me that praise, lavished in the way that I lavished it, could do no credit either to the commended or the commender. We discussed some questions on the subject of religion, in which her opinions approached much nearer to the received ones than mine. As the conversation proceeded, I became dissatisfied with the tone of my own share in it. We touched upon all topics without treating forcibly or connectedly upon any. Meanwhile, I did her justice, in giving an account of the conversation to a party in which I supped, though I was not sparing to my blame, to yield her the praise of a person of active and independent thinking. On her side she did me no part of what perhaps I considered as justice."

In this account, written after Mary's

death, one can still hear the lingering echoes of Godwin's annoyance and hurt pride.

When, after Imlay's desertion, Mary returned to her old work in London, Godwin came once more into contact with her. She was thirty-seven years of age and he three years older. Northcote's portrait of him shows a face that is not handsome, but intellectual, and with the lines of strength of character. His head was shapely, his forehead high, and his nose long. He was clean-shaven, short and sturdy in build and soberly dressed. Hazlitt, who admired him, likened him to an eight-day clock that must be wound up long before it could strike. His nature had reached its best in middle-life. The angularities of his youth were softened and the meanness of old age had not begun to grow. He was honest, high-principled, and ever ready to help a friend. He lived by method, and reason was his god. His temperament was cold and he felt himself to be aloof from the ordinary passions that fret mankind.

He read Mary's *Letters from Norway* and greatly admired it. The book seemed to him a decided advance on her earlier work,

and his respect for her brain was immediately captured. Her sad story and the stand she had made against what he considered the slavery of marriage appealed to him too, and he met her again with far more willingness than he would have believed to be possible.

He found an altered Mary now. She was quieter, paler, less inclined to fling her opinions at reluctant ears. Her great interest was her small daughter, Fanny, whom she obviously loved with a warmth that amazed the celibate Godwin. She was living in Cumming Street, Pentonville, not far from his own home, and they frequently met at the house of Mr. Johnson, Miss Hayes, or some other mutual friend.

It is not difficult to understand the sudden collapse of Godwin's austerity. Once his interest and sympathy had been captured, the way was open for Mary's good looks and the selfless nobility of her nature. Two other women had touched some unprotected corner of his cautious heart, but he never before felt the spontaneous, unreasoning love that Mary inspired in him. The author of *Political Justice* read through his book again

and wondered if some other man had written those cold sentences urging that passion be regulated by reason and love put in the background of life.

Mary, still bearing the wounds of Imlay's desertion, found help in Godwin's sympathetic friendship. Here was someone to whom she could talk freely, whose interests and opinions were akin to her own. She was very lonely in London after the central figure in existence was lost to her. Some women, when they have loved to a tragic end, shut up their hearts and keep them inviolate, feeding on memories and strengthened by the barren props of faithfulness. In others the pain of loss can only be eased by a new lover. To such women comes the unpalatable realisation that passion, once roused, does not die with the occasion that stirred it, but reaches out only too easily to another object. Mary was this type. She had spent the first radiant treasure of love on Imlay and what she gave Godwin lacked something, perhaps, in glamour and thrill. But he was a good man and kind to her and Fanny, and the increasingly obvious fact that he loved her was very

comforting to pride humiliated by Imlay's faithfulness.

The affair grew slowly through the late spring. Plane trees unfurled in London streets, and Fanny Imlay made daisy chains in the meadows of Somers Town where Mary now lived.

In July Godwin went to Norfolk for three weeks. When he returned, in the gladness of that first meeting, they confessed to each other that love had become a master whose commands could not be ignored. A life apart held no happiness for them. By September reason had been allowed to drift to the winds and Mary had almost forgotten the sweet bland faces of the primroses at Neuilly. Chrysanthemums were blooming at Somers Town and she and William Godwin were lovers.

CHAPTER TEN

No. 29 *Polygon*

"WE did not marry," wrote Godwin, describing this time. ". . . Certainly nothing can be so ridiculous upon the face of it or so contrary to the genuine march of sentiment, as to require the overflowing of the soul to wait upon a ceremony, and that which, wherever delicacy and imagination exist, is of all things most sacredly private, to blow a trumpet before it, and to record the moment when it has arrived at its climax."

They were both in a position which made a formal ceremony seem awkward and inconsistent. Mary was still known as Mrs. Imlay and her friends doggedly clung to the belief that she had been married in Paris. Godwin had been so emphatically opposed to matrimony in *Political Justice* that he felt a certain diffidence about summoning his followers to a wedding feast which would also be the funeral of his principles. So they left both law and religion out of the compact.

It is significant of Mary's buoyant trustfulness that she could once more give herself to a man's keeping without legal protection for her rights.

So the new life started. They did not share the same house, believing, Godwin said, "that it was possible for two persons to be too uniformly in each other's society." Godwin had rooms in the same street in Somers Town where Mary lived with Fanny. Each pursued an independent existence without reference to the other. Mary went on with her literary work, looked after her house and played with Fanny. Sometimes Godwin came to see her and sometimes they met at the theatre or at the house of a friend. If one of them wanted to be sure of finding the other, he wrote to make a definite appointment.

This curious arrangement lasted through the winter and into the New Year of 1797. Then Nature upset the careful plans of pure reason. Mary was going to have a child, and she and Godwin could no longer take only their own principles into consideration. The rights of the unborn child had to be protected. So far their relationship had

been kept a secret, but that would no longer be possible. Fanny Imlay was illegitimate, and not even her mother's love could protect her from the slur of her birth. Mary was very loth to condemn another child to the shame that hung in wait for the innocent Fanny. And she was older now than in the days of Havre and Paris, and her lot was in the midst of friends to whom concealment was impossible. In France there was no one to point at her and whisper: here malicious tongues would be barbed and friendly ones shocked. A few years ago she might have held up her head and faced it, but time—shadowed with suffering and humiliation, with the agony of that November evening by the river at Putney, and lonely tears wept in France—had worn away some of the fine edge of her courage. It seemed better to have her baby born into sunshine and peace than to conscript him into the army of martyrs to a social cause. Says Godwin: "She was unwilling, and perhaps with reason, to incur that exclusion from the society of many valuable and excellent individuals, which custom awards in cases of this sort."

So on March 29th, 1797, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin were legally married at old Saint Pancras Church, London. The affair seemed so unimportant to the bridegroom that he made no reference to it in the diary in which he chronicled the happenings of his daily life.

For a time no one was told of this ceremony. Godwin was still sensitive about the overthrow of his principles and dreaded the comments that would be made when it was known that the author of *Political Justice* was actually married. Another reason for the secrecy is suggested by Mrs. Shelley—the child whose existence had led to the marriage. She says that Mary was at this time seriously embarrassed for money. Imlay had given her nothing and she, with Fanny to look after, could not earn as much as she had done in earlier days. Godwin had a rule of life not to make more money than he actually needed, and at this crisis could not help his wife to pay some debts that she owed. Since Imlay's desertion, Mr. Johnson and a few other friends had made generous presents to Mary, and Godwin feared that the announcement of her marriage would cause the

stream to dry up. This rather contemptible attitude is a forecast of Godwin's latter years, which were corrupted by his incessant borrowing from his friends.

On this occasion also he borrowed. A Mr. Thomas Wedgwood lent him fifty pounds, and Godwin felt that with this sum he could risk losing the aid of Mary's friends. Consistency of principle could no longer be considered now, with the time of Mary's confinement just at the far end of the summer. On April 10th he wrote a tentative and shamefaced letter to Miss Hayes :

" My fair neighbour desires me to announce to you a piece of news which it is consonant to the regard that she and I entertain for you, you should rather learn from us than from any other quarter. She bids me remind you of the earnest way in which you pressed me to prevail upon her to change her name, and she directs me to add, that it has happened to me, like many other disputants, to be entrapped in my own toils : in short, that we found that there was no way so obvious for her to drop the name of Imlay, as to assume the name of Godwin. Mrs. Godwin—who the devil is that ?—will be

glad to see you at No. 29 Polygon, Somers Town, whenever you are inclined to favour her with a call."

The announcement of the marriage met with a good deal of disfavour. For one thing, it thrust into unpleasant prominence the fact that Mary's union with Captain Imlay had been irregular. Also a few women who had valued Godwin's friendship were not enthusiastic when they found that he loved someone else. The brunt of their annoyance fell on Mary. Both Mrs. Inchbauld, the authoress, and Mrs. Siddons refused to have anything more to do with her. Mrs. Inchbauld's motive was certainly jealously cloaked in moral indignation, but Godwin insists that Mrs. Siddons was only afraid that her delicately-poised reputation as a pure-living actress would be threatened by intercourse with revolutionary characters. Mrs. Reveley burst into tears when she heard of the wedding, but when she came to know Mary all her resentment was melted into love and admiration. An ironical comment on the situation was made by Fuseli in a letter to a friend : " You have not perhaps heard that the assertrix of female rights has

given her hand to the *balancier* of political justice."

In spite of criticism the spring and summer of 1797 was undoubtedly the happiest time in Mary's life. It was her first season of calm and security. All the storms of childhood and youth and the long agony of tragic love were over and and she was left, at the age of thirty-eight, with nothing but happiness in sight. Godwin loved her with the warmth and single-heartedness of a man to whom love is a new adventure. She brought to light the best in his nature, and his faults were of a kind that she could easily forgive. She had Fanny, rosy and chattering, and the joyful prospect of another claim on her tenderness. Her friends were devoted and her enemies did not seem to count just now. "She had always possessed in an unparalleled degree," wrote Godwin, looking back through bereavement to those bright days, "the art of communicating happiness."

Even after the ceremony in old St. Pancras Church, the Godwins continued to live in separate houses. They were both very busy. "Ours was not an idle happiness, a paradise of selfish and tranitory pleasures,"

said Godwin. Money was not plentiful, and Mr. Johnson was glad to keep Mary well supplied with work. Her chief literary interest at this time was the novel *Maria*, to which reference has already been made.

Between their meetings husband and wife kept in close touch with the letters they wrote. The little notes that Mary sent up the road are full of charming touches. They show the completeness of the companionship that existed and the strength of a love that was not disturbed by a mutual independence that would wreck many marriages. They show, too, that Godwin was expected to take an interest in the trivial excitements of domesticity. Mary writes of salt beef : " . . . do not give Fanny a cake to-day. I am afraid she staid too long with you yesterday " . . . of books . . . of visits from friends . . . of a cat afflicted with fits . . . of Fanny's pleasure going out to dinner alone with her stepfather and a warning that she must not have butter with her pudding. And Godwin thrust aside his dusty books to listen to Fanny's prattle and push the butter out of her reach, returning to them again when the

child had gone home with an answering note to Mary firm in her earnest grasp.

In June, Godwin went with Mr. Basil Montague for a fortnight's tour in Staffordshire, driving in a one-horse carriage. Mary's health was excellent and she was entirely without the fears common to her condition. Fanny's birth had been so easy that she felt no misgiving about that of the newcomer, who was spoken of as "William." There was no reason why Godwin should not go away, and he set off, promising to bring a mug home for Fanny.

There is no importance in this little holiday jaunt of Godwin's except for the opportunity it gave for letter-writing. Godwin sent long descriptions of scenery and people, written in the guide-book style and illuminated with flashes of tenderness for his family at home. It is obvious that the claims of domesticity had become very sweet to him. His love for Mary is always pushing up to the surface of his mind, and Fanny's mug seems to have been a constant anxiety. "Tell Fanny I am safely arrived in the land of mugs." And then: "Tell Fanny that we have chosen a mug for her." He is full

of concern for Mary's health and for the welfare of the unborn " William " : " Kiss Fanny for me, remember William, but most of all, take care of yourself."

Mary's replies are very different from the ardent, uneasy letters that she sent to Imlay. Her feelings for Godwin were drawn from a deep and tranquil well, whose calm stability can be tender, playful, occasionally rebuking, without any great stirring of the depths.

" Men are spoilt by frankness, I believe, yet I must tell you that I love you better than I supposed I did when I promised to love you for ever. . . . I am not fatigued with solitude, yet I have not relished my solitary dinner. A husband is a convenient part of the furniture of the house, unless he is a clumsy fixture. I wish you, from my soul, to be riveted in my heart, but I do not desire to have you always at my elbow, though at this moment I should not care if you were."

Godwin returned home and Fanny had a splendid new mug for her milk. The husband and wife settled down again in their separate houses in the Polygon, writing their little notes and waiting through the sultry, golden days for the pleasure of " William."

On August 30th Mary wrote to Godwin that the birth was imminent. She sent for Mrs. Blenkinsop, matron and midwife to the Westminster Lying-in Hospital. It was the custom of the time for a man to officiate on these occasions, and Godwin says that in engaging a woman she was "influenced by ideas of decorum, which certainly ought to have no place, at least in cases of danger." It seems, on the face of it, to be a decision of commonsense rather than prudery, and in her *Rights of Woman* Mary had expressed her views on the subject: "And midwifery, decency seems to allot to them (*i.e.*, women) though I am afraid the word midwife in our dictionaries will soon give place to *accoucheur*, and one proof of the former delicacy of the sex will be effaced from the language."

At any rate, Mrs. Blenkinsop came, and Godwin was asked to keep away until Mary 'could perform the interesting office of presenting the new-born child to its father."

Late that night he was sitting in the parlour below when word came down to him that a child had been born at twenty minutes past eleven. It was not the "William" of their fancies, but a little daughter who was

to be called Mary. Everything went well till two o'clock when the mother suddenly became alarmingly ill, and Dr. Poignard of Westminster Hospital and Dr. Fordyce were sent for. By breakfast time the danger seemed to be over, and for a few days Mary's progress was slow but apparently good.

Then on Sunday, September 3rd, she became very ill, and from that time till her death a week later, September 10th, the doctors had no hope of her recovery.

With the morbid interest of the newly bereaved, Godwin in his memoir dwells on every incident of that tragic week. Mary had some days of intense suffering. Her doctors and friends gave her every attention of love and skill : Godwin was almost distraught in his anxiety, though even then he did not lose his habitual love of reason. Mary, in the relief of an anodyne given to subdue her pain, cried out to him : " Oh, Godwin, I am in heaven ! " But he, the consistent disbeliever in heaven, replied : " You mean, my dear, that your physical sensations are somewhat easier." It was perhaps in a final revolt against this attitude that on almost the last day of her life, she

murmured, regarding an argumentative maidservant, "Pray, pray do not let her reason with me."

Godwin relates that she was "affectionate and compliant to the last." Miss Hayes, one of the faithful friends who nursed her, sent an account of her illness to Hugh Skeys, widower of Fanny Blood :

"Myself and Mrs. Fenwick were the two female friends that were with Mrs. Godwin during her last illness. Mrs. Fenwick attended her from the beginning of her confinement with scarcely any intermission. I was with her for the last four days of her life ; and though I have had but little experience of scenes of this sort, yet I can confidently affirm that my imagination could never have pictured to me a mind so tranquil under affliction so great. . . . Her whole soul seemed to dwell with anxious fondness on her friends, and her affections, which were at all times more alive than perhaps those of any other human being, seemed to gain new disinterestedness upon this trying occasion. The attachment and regret of those who surrounded her seemed to increase every hour ; and if her principles

are to be judged of by what I saw of her death, I should say that no principles could be more conducive to calmness and consolation."

In those urbane misty days of early September, Mary's life drew swiftly near its end. From houses in the Polygon, smoke twisted up towards the low, autumnal sky and late roses sweetened the gardens. Through the heavy stillness of approaching death, Fanny's shrill petulant voice sometimes pierced with fine silver her mother's consciousness.

Mary was thirty-eight years of age and perhaps had scarcely reached the flowering height of her powers. She had come through a turbulent youth into a sudden vista of happiness and fame. A few months before, she had sought death vainly and now, when life was radiant and beloved, death found and conquered her. The last days may have been an agony of regret and fruitless pleading. Or perhaps the future of Godwin, of Fanny and of the baby whose existence was so dearly bought held no interest for her then. It was all darkness and mystery and her mind could more

easily grope back through the chambers of her memory, where the lighted, pleasant things were nearest to her reach. The walk between Godwin's house and hers, and Fanny's pleasure in the mug ; the dewy tinkle of cowbells in Norway ; Mr. Johnson's kind face ; the thud of great waves outside Havre harbour and the way Fanny stumbled in her first delicious steps ; primroses at Neuilly ; the marbled covers of the *Vindication* ; young Margaret King in her frilled muslin gown and Fanny Blood's voice singing as she painted ; the boisterous winds of Beverley streaming through her hair ; the quiet warm peace of night after a child's interminable day.

CONCLUSION.

MARY died on the morning of Sunday, September 10th, and the funeral took place on the following Friday. Godwin was too ill to attend it. She was buried at old Saint Pancras, where six months earlier she had been married. It had a quiet country churchyard and a large willow tree hung over the monument that marked her grave. Godwin was buried there too in 1839, but not long afterwards the growth of the Midland Railway broke into the graveyard's peace and Sir Percy Shelley moved the bodies of his grandparents to a cemetery in Bournemouth.

Soon after Mary's death her memory was violently attacked. Cruel insinuations were made against her character and the purity of her motives. It was easy, apparently, to forget her unfailing kindness and sympathy and the courage with which she had striven to improve the conditions of her sex. It was still easier to remember that she had lived, unmarried, with two men. To answer

some of the calumny thrown at a dead pioneer, Godwin published his *Memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft*, in which he insists that "there are no circumstances of her life that, in the judgment of honour and reason, could brand her with disgrace." The book did more harm than good. Godwin was unpopular, save with his intimate friends, and he was known to be an atheist and to hold unconventional moral views. His defence of Mary was used as a further weapon for slinging mud at her memory. It was not until eighty years after her death that any serious attempt was made to vindicate her. This was done by Mr. Kegan Paul.

A life goes on with those whom it has loved and so there is, perhaps, interest in following for a little way the mourning family of Somers Town.

William Godwin, bewildered with the care of two small children, re-married in 1801. His second wife was a widow, Mrs. Clairmont, who had a son and daughter by her previous marriage. The daughter, Jane, became the mistress of Lord Byron and the mother of Allegra. In 1803, William

Godwin, offspring of the new union, was born. He died at the age of 29.

The baby who had cost her mother's life, Mary Godwin, grew up into a strange mixture of sweetness, genius and melancholy. At the age of 16 she was wooed by Shelley in the graveyard where leafy shadows spattered across the tomb of the elder Mary. They ran away together and were married in 1816 after the suicide of Shelley's wife, Harriet Westbrooke. By the summer of 1822, the world had lost one of its great poets and Mary was left a widow.

Fanny Imlay committed suicide when she was only twenty-two. She was a bright and charming girl, the tranquil sunshine of the Godwin household in which she had no legal place. But behind it all, gnawing at youth and gaiety, was the bitterness of her inheritance—Mary's anguish of doubts, the infidelity of Imlay, the stigma of illegimate birth. Mrs. Godwin, a sour-tongued woman, vowed that Fanny's heart was broken when Shelley married her half-sister, but the cause is more likely to have been the curse of her birthright, the

final penalty paid for those sweet, heedless days at Neuilly.

Time did not deal graciously with William Godwin. After Mary's death his moral and intellectual fibres seemed to wear thin. He did little more good work. In 1805 he started a publisher's business in Skinner Street, Holborn, but the scheme failed completely after a few years and almost the only notable feature of it was the publication of the *Tales* of Charles and Mary Lamb in Godwin's "Juvenile Library" series. He became totally unable to live on his income, and he was a very unscrupulous borrower, both from friends and from those, like his son-in-law, Shelley, whom he treated with uncivil contempt. Godwin, in his later years, is one of the thoroughly unpleasant figures of the time. In 1836 he died, a year before young Queen Victoria ascended the throne. He was eighty at the time of his death, and in the long, eventful life that he could look back on, the clear voice and auburn hair of Mary Wollstonecraft must have been memories very hard to recapture.

And yet the mark he left on the sands of history was a faint thing compared with the

pioneer road cut by Mary. She, in her short life, was hampered and fretted by the restrictions that the times imposed on her sex, but her mental outlook was wider than that of any woman who followed her. She had to struggle for education in days when knowledge was considered small ornament to women. Even her great gifts could help her to little more than a skeleton livelihood, and bitter, ugly scorn was flung on the first book that she wrote. But her brave mind pushed its way through the boundaries that would have hemmed it in. Beyond her own struggles and humiliations, she saw a free sex. She saw women the proud equals of men, not the petted inferiors whose happiness in life was solely dependent on their sexual charm. She saw them following honourable professions, sharing in the government of the country, dividing the opportunities of life fairly between their sons and daughters. She saw, indeed, what we in the twentieth century have watched slowly growing before our eyes.

It was not for many years after Mary Wollstonecraft's death that her visions materialised. The *Vindication of the Rights*

of Woman had been translated into several languages, and so was carrying its message across Europe, but for a long time its influence was smothered by the reactionary tendencies of the period. Early in the nineteenth century the infamous Code of Napoleon Bonaparte thrust the Women's movement back over the small stretch of ground that it had covered. This Code provided that a man might with impunity slay his wife for adultery, that the mother of an illegitimate child could make no claim for maintenance against the father, that the State should regulate prostitution. Frenchwomen still suffer from the results of this iniquitous doctrine, and their legal status today is lower than that which the civilisation of the country should have effected.

By the middle of the last century England was deep in the comfortable torpor of the Victorian era, ruled by a Queen who stated that to be " fruitful and obedient " were the chief duties of woman. A well-stocked nursery, good stiff silks, a husband well fed to a point of contentment when he was quite ready to lie back in the one comfortable chair and call her blessed. It was another version

of the Hanover period of the subservience of women, but there was a difference. This was the resurrection of the spirit of Mary Wollstonecraft from its tomb of calumny and mistrust. The *Vindication*, written in those hurried weeks in George Street, became the text-book of every brave woman struggling for the advancement of her sex. In 1865 Elizabeth Garrett applied for admission to the medical schools and became the first woman doctor to practise in this country. Eleven years before this, Florence Nightingale and her band of helpers set sail for the Crimea and established the employment of women nurses in the army. In 1869 Josephine Butler began her long fight against the Contagious Diseases Acts, which, thanks to her efforts, were repealed in 1886.

The Women Suffrage Movement dates back to 1867, when John Stuart Mill moved an amendment to the Reform Bill. The amendment was lost, though Mill also presented to the House a woman suffrage petition containing 1,499 names. Two years later women were admitted to Municipal Franchise, and in 1870 the first Married Woman's Property Act gave the married

woman a right to her own earnings. University education was made possible for women in 1867 and 1871, and in 1876 an Act of Parliament, following the struggles of Sophia Jex-Blake, threw open the medical profession.

Between then and the granting of the franchise in 1916 the history of England has been racked and seamed by women's fight for what they considered their due. In 1903 the founding, by Mrs. Pankhurst, of the Women's Social and Political Union was the first step taken in the campaign of militancy, which did not end till the outbreak of the Great War. In the election of 1918, a month after the Armistice, women voted for the first time; in 1919 the first woman member, Lady Astor, sat in the House of Commons.

So the visions of Mary Wollstonecraft have been fulfilled. To-day only the limitations of physical strength hamper the woman in pursuit of her ambitions. The sentiments and proprieties that beset the eager minds of the eighteenth century seem ludicrous now, and Mary's revolutionary theories make hum-drum reading. Yet the free

woman of to-day can scarcely over-estimate the debt she owes to the pioneer who dreamed her splendid dreams in George Street. Her mind was so far ahead of the time she lived in, that had Mary not started the road to women's freedom, it is very certain that years might have passed before another brave soul ventured it. The ideals she set have never been surmounted and no modern programme of advancement has passed the aim that she in her darkness saw shining far ahead.

BOOKS RECOMMENDED

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, by Elizabeth Robins Pennell.

Mary Wollstonecraft, by G. R. Stirling Taylor.

A memoir of the author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman by William Godwin.

William Godwin : His Friends and Contemporaries, by C. Kegan Paul.

Shelley, Godwin and their Circle, by H. N. Brailsford.

Cambridge History of Modern Literature : Vol. XI.

The Age of Johnson, by Thomas Seecombe.

The Age of Wordsworth, by C. H. Herford.

Letters to Imlay ; edited by C. Kegan Paul.

The Feminist Movement, by Mrs. Philip Snowden.

The Emancipation of Englishwomen, by Lyon Blease.

Life of Fuseli, by Knowles.

PRINCIPAL DATES.

	Mary Wollstonecraft.	Contemporary Events.
1759	Mary Wollstonecraft born (April 27).	Capture of Quebec.
		Burns born.
		Schiller born.
		Handel died.
1770		Wordsworth born.
1775	Meeting with Frances Blood.	-1781 American War of Independence.
		Jane Austen born.
1780	Mrs. Wollstonecraft died.	Gordon Riots.
1784	Eliza Wollstonecraft married.	Dr. Johnson died.
1786	"Thoughts on the Education of Daughters."	Trial of Warren Hastings opened.
1788	"Mary."	
1789	Settled in George Street London.	Outbreak of the French Revolution.
1791	"Original Stories."	Boswell's "Life of Johnson."
	"Vindication of the Rights of Man."	Burke's "Reflections on the Revolution in France."
	"Vindication of the Rights of Woman."	Paine's "Rights of Man."
1792	Went to France.	Shelley born.
1793	Began life with Imlay.	Execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.
		War between England and France.
		Godwin's "Political Justice."

1794	Fanny Imlay born.	Howe defeated the French off Brest.
1795	First attempt at suicide. Visit to Scandinavia. Second attempt at suicide. Final desertion by Imlay.	
1796	"Letters from Norway, Sweden and Denmark." Began life with William Godwin.	Keats born.
1797	Marriage with Godwin.	"Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility" published.
	Mary Godwin born. Death of Mary Wollstonecraft (Sept : 10).	

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